

California State Archives
State Government Oral History Program

Oral History Interview

with

RICHARD J ALATORRE

Los Angeles City Councilman 1985-
California State Assemblyman 1973-1985

April 29 May 31 June 20 July 10 July 15
July 22 November 9 November 10 1989 July 13 1990
Los Angeles California

By Carlos Vásquez
Oral History Program
University of California Los Angeles

Volume One



March Fong Eu
Secretary of State

California State Archives
1020 O Street Room 130
Sacramento CA 95814

Information	(916) 445 4293
Document Restoration	(916) 445 4293
Exhibit Hall	(916) 445 0748
Legislative Bill Service	(916) 445 2832
(prior years)	

PREFACE

On September 25 1985 Governor George Deukmejian signed into law A B 2104 (Chapter 965 of the Statutes of 1985) This legislation established under the administration of the California State Archives a State Government Oral History Program to provide through the use of oral history a continuing documentation of state policy development as reflected in California's legislative and executive history '

The following interview is one of a series of oral histories undertaken for inclusion in the state program These interviews offer insights into the actual workings of both the legislative and executive processes and policy mechanisms They also offer an increased understanding of the men and women who create legislation and implement state policy Further they provide an overview of issue development in California state government and of how both the legislative and executive branches of government deal with issues and problems facing the state

Interviewees are chosen primarily on the basis of their contributions to and influence on the policy process of the state of California They include members of the legislative and executive branches of the state government as well as legislative staff advocates members of the media and other people who played significant roles in specific issue areas of major and continuing importance to California

By authorizing the California State Archives to work cooperatively with oral history units at California colleges and universities to conduct interviews this program is structured to take advantage of the resources and expertise in oral history available through California's several institutionally based programs

Participating as cooperating institutions in the State
Government Oral History Program are

Oral History Program
History Department
California State University, Fullerton

Oral History Program
Center for California Studies
California State University Sacramento

Oral History Program
Claremont Graduate School

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California Berkeley

Oral History Program
University of California Los Angeles

The establishment of the California State Archives State
Government Oral History Program marks one of the most
significant commitments made by any state toward the
preservation and documentation of its governmental his-
tory It supplements the often fragmentary historical
written record by adding an organized primary source
enriching the historical information available on given
topics and allowing for more thorough historical analysis
As such the program through the preservation and publi-
cation of interviews such as the one which follows will
be of lasting value to current and future generations of
scholars citizens and leaders

John F Burns
State Archivist

July 27 1988

RESTRICTIONS ON THIS INTERVIEW

Access to this interview is restricted until October 1 2000 without written permission of interviewee

LITERARY RIGHTS AND QUOTATION

This manuscript is hereby made available for research purposes only No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the California State Archivist or the Head Department of Special Collections University Research Library UCLA

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to

California State Archives
1020 O Street Room 130
Sacramento CA 95814

or

Department of Special Collections
University Research Library
405 S Hilgard Avenue
UCLA
Los Angeles CA 90024-1575

The request should include identification of the specific passages and identification of the user

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows

Richard J Alatorre Oral History Interview Conducted 1989 and 1990 by Carlos Vasquez UCLA Oral History Program for the California State Archives State Government Oral History Program

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTERVIEW HISTORY	1
BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY	iii
SESSION 1 April 29 1989	
[Tape 1 Side A]	1
Family history--Alatorre's father--His grandmother's influence--Growing up in a rough East Los Angeles neighborhood--The dichotomy of being a good student and still a discipline problem--More on his father--Experiences of discrimination in school--Decision to attend California State University Los Angeles--A difficult initial adjustment to college--Gets married becomes a father works full-time while still a student--His father dies and his first son is born on the same day--Impact of his father's death	
[Tape 1 Side B]	30
Why Alatorre decided to pursue an M A degree in public administration--What he learned from working in a jewelry store--He meets Philip Montez and a close relationship begins--The Foundation for Mexican-American Studies--Saul Alinsky--Working with young delinquents--A Ford Foundation legislative internship--Working for Assemblyman Walter J Karabian--Becomes Southwest regional director for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense and Educational Fund--Laying the groundwork for the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund	

SESSION 2 May 31 1989

[Tape 2 Side A]

47

Alatorre's perception of racism against the Mexican community--The lack of elected representatives--The caliber of those candidates who ran in the Mexican community--Assessments of Assemblymen John Moreno and Philip L Soto--The Mexican-American Political Association (MAPA)--Why rural chapters of MAPA are stronger--Origins of the civil rights movement in Los Angeles in the 1960s--Competition between blacks and Chicanos--Gangs why they exist and why trying to do away with them is naive--Efforts in the Social Action Training Center to channel the energy and leadership of gang members--Alatorre could always relate well to blacks--A comparative discussion of Congressmen Augustus F Hawkins and Edward R Roybal--More on conflicts among Chicanos and blacks in poverty programs--Who benefitted from the poverty programs--Activities promoted by poverty programs reduced gang warfare--How Chicano youth embarrassed their parents into social action--Raising bail money for the "L A Thirteen --The 1970 Chicano Moratorium--Why the Chicano movement declined--Pressuring the University of California Irvine (UCI) administration to adopt affirmative action programs--How Karabian trusted him

[Tape 2 Side B]

79

Working as Karabian's administrative assistant--Assigned to Assemblyman David A Roberti's state senate campaign--Speaker of the Assembly Bob Moretti supports Ralph M Ochoa against Alatorre--Karabian's support of Alatorre's special election campaign--Alatorre 'discovers' the gay vote--Using mobile television units to campaign door-to-door--Other 'gimmicks' used in that campaign--Opposition of La Raza Unida party (LRUP) and the possible involvement of the Committee to Reelect the President (CRP)--Alatorre's response to "dirty tricks" tactics by the opposition--The loss of the 1971 election to Bill Brophy--Victory in the following election

The role of Donald H Segretti in Alatorre's unsuccessful 1972 campaign--Evidence that CRP monies were funneled into La Raza Unida party--More on Segretti's role in Alatorre's first campaign--Evidence of earlier CRP participation in state campaigns--Republican efforts to court or neutralize the Hispanic vote are more sophisticated today--LRUP leadership--Working from within and from without the Democratic party--Political gadflies mask their inability to get things done--Alatorre's assembly district--Advantages and disadvantages of being the 'guy in the three-piece suit --More on support solicited from the gay community--The Chicano areas of the assembly district--A new assemblyman with some knowledge of Sacramento and the legislative process--Friendships were important personal loyalties were important--A rapprochement with Speaker Moretti--The role of Alatorre's election in winning back the Democrats's advantage in reapportionment--Organizing a Chicano Caucus in the state legislature--Making the Chicano Caucus a force and demonstrating Chicano money could be raised--Liberal legislators were the true enemies of the people --Liberals who were loyal to their word--Conservative legislators were more consistent--Friendships are everything among legislators--You have to get along or you don't survive

The importance of party loyalty--How choices are often between the lesser of evils--The political process breeds mediocrity rather than excellence--Committee assignments--How he got on the Committee on Ways and Means--A comparison of Jesse M Unruh and Willie L Brown Jr --How Brown and Alatorre pressured UCI to implement an affirmative action program--Using a similar plan to diversify the Boalt Hall School of Law University of California--Seeing results from the political bartering system--Working on prison reform and prisoner rehabilitation in a changing political climate--Combating medical

experimentation on prison inmates--Examples of surprise visits to state prison facilities-- Prison reform hurt him with some legislative colleagues--Prison reform unpopular in the contemporary social climate--The most important lesson from his first term--How his rapid rise was followed by an equally rapid decline in prominence in the assembly--His most important accomplishments in the first term--The Select Committee on Farm Labor Violence

SESSION 4 July 10 1989

[Tape 4 Side A]

156

More on the formation and function of the state legislative Chicano Caucus--Ideological and stylistic differences among Chicano legislators --How one Chicano legislator hoped to remain in office by appeasing his enemies--An assessment of individual members of the Chicano Caucus--How Alatorre became the caucus's first chairman--His support for Willie Brown's first attempt to become Speaker of the Assembly--The Chicano Caucus's greatest accomplishment--How Alatorre was able to take care of his base of support-- Problems Alatorre had as a result of championing Chicano issues--Why he decided not to challenge Alex Garcia in the Twenty-fourth Senatorial District--Speaker of the Assembly Leo T McCarthy s attempts to isolate Alatorre-- Comparing Speakers McCarthy and Moretti-- Personal loyalties lead to political loyalties-- Art Torres's race against Philip L Soto in the Fifty-sixth Assembly District in 1974--Torres's most formidable opponent--Charges that Alatorre wanted to build a political machine

[Tape 4 Side B]

183

More on charges that Alatorre wanted to build a political machine--Torres and Alatorre in conflict with Governor Edmund G "Jerry Brown Jr and Speaker McCarthy--Farm labor legislation--César Chávez--Pressure by Chavez to support Howard L Berman for Speaker of the Assembly--Torres's position

Assessment of Jerry Brown as a liberal Democrat--
Although Brown opened up important areas of the
judicial system to Chicanos many of his
appointments were ill-conceived and naive--
Alatorre's criticism of Mario Obledo's
appointment to head the Department of Health and
Welfare--Obledo had no influence within the
department he headed--The closed coterie of
Brown's advisers--Brown's policy of not
commenting on pending legislation left his
partisan allies in the legislature without a
sense of where he stood on critical Democratic
legislation--No legislative initiatives came
from the top --The Democratic party in
California still suffers from Brown's moonbeam
governorship--Brown's insensitivity to his
parents--How Brown's meeting to decide upon his
first bid for governor was reduced to deciding
under what name to run--A more recent example of
Brown's reputation damaging a local city
election--Brown's ineffectiveness in dealing
with the legislature--Reforms took place in
spite of Brown--Alatorre reconstructs the
campaign to pass landmark farm labor
legislation--McCarthy's role in keeping Alatorre
on the sidelines when recognition was given for
the initiation of farm labor legislation--The
focus of Proposition 13 taxes or politicians?

Watergate and state political reform
initiatives--Reforms like the Fair Political
Practices Act and Commission (FPPC) have closed
rather than opened up the political system--How
legislative reforms often force officeholders to
cut ethical corners--Citizen-legislator versus
the professional legislator--The problem of
incumbent 'inbreeding"--Alatorre's proposals for
public campaign finance legislation--How
Proposition 9 of 1974 increases the influence of
special interests--Most proposed campaign
reforms favor incumbents--By putting limits on
an incumbent's terms the people lose effective
legislators--The evolution of professional
legislative staffs in California--The notion of

a unicameral legislature--How the initiative process has been abused by special interests--Multi-issue initiatives--Why legislators support issues they might not believe in--The quality of government is better than what people deserve--Television and the electorate's understanding of important issues--The dangers of media ownership consolidation--Moralistic expectations of prominent political figures are unreasonable and hypocritical

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interviewer/Editor

Carlos Vázquez
Director UCLA State Government Interview Series
UCLA Oral History Program
B A UCLA [Political Science]
M A Stanford University [Political Science]
Ph D candidate UCLA [History]

Interview Time and Place

April 29 1989
Alatorre's office in Los Angeles CA
Session of one hour

May 31 1989
Alatorre's office in Los Angeles CA
Session of one hour

June 20 1989
Alatorre's office in Los Angeles CA
Session of one and one-quarter hours

July 10 1989
Alatorre's home in Los Angeles CA
Session of one and one-quarter hours

July 15 1989
Alatorre's home in Los Angeles CA
Session of one and one-half hours

July 22 1989
Alatorre's home in Los Angeles CA
Session of one and three-quarter hours

November 9 1989
Alatorre's home in Los Angeles CA
Session of one-half hour

November 10 1989
Alatorre's home in Los Angeles CA
Session of three-quarters of an hour

July 13 1990
Alatorre's home in Los Angeles CA
Session of one and one-quarter hours

Editing

Vásquez checked the verbatim manuscript of the interview against the original tape recordings and with David Gist edited for punctuation paragraphing and spellings and verified proper names. Insertions by the editor are bracketed. Vásquez prepared the introductory materials.

Alatorre did not review the draft transcript but approved UCLA preparation of the final transcript.

Papers

There exist no private papers which the interviewer was able to consult for this interview.

Tapes and Interview Records

The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives at UCLA along with the records relating to the interview. Master tapes are preserved at the California State Archives.

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Richard J Alatorre was born on May 15 1943 in Los Angeles California and attended public schools in East Los Angeles He graduated from James A Garfield High School where he was elected student body president He earned a B A in sociology from California State University Los Angeles in 1965 and an M A in public administration from the University of Southern California in 1971

Alatorre became involved in Democratic party politics as a high school student in the John F Kennedy presidential campaign Between 1966 and 1972 when he was himself elected to office he worked in or directed the campaigns of Alfred H Song for state senator Walter J Karabian for state assembly Julian Nava for Los Angeles Board of Education Thomas Bradley for mayor of Los Angeles Herman Sillas for state controller and David A Roberti for state senator In 1968 at the age of twenty-five he became a member of the California Democratic State Central Committee In addition to his activity in the Democratic party Alatorre was also an activist in the Chicano community as a member of the Congress of Mexican-American Unity and co-chair of the Chicano Legal Defense Fund among other organizations He worked with the Foundation for Mexican-American Studies and the Center for Social Action redirecting gang members to use their leadership skills for socially productive ends

In 1968 Alatorre received a Ford Foundation legislative internship to the state assembly That same year he became Southwest regional director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense and Educational Fund in Los Angeles Between 1969 and 1971 he taught public administration and Chicano Studies at California State University Long Beach and the University of California Irvine as well as at Terminal Island Correctional Facility

After helping elect Roberti to the senate in July of 1971 Alatorre ran in a special election to fill Roberti's vacated seat representing the largely Democratic Forty-eighth Assembly District Alatorre defeated Ralph M Ochoa who had the support of Speaker of the Assembly Bob Moretti and other Democrats in the October primary only to lose a bitterly contested election to Republican Bill Brophy in November due primarily to the opposition of La Raza Unida party and low voter turnout The following year he ran for the seat again handily defeating Ochoa and other Democrats

in the June primary In November he won an impressive victory over Republican Bill King a former Brophy aide and served six terms in the assembly until 1985 when he was elected to the Los Angeles City Council

As a freshman assemblyman at the age of twenty-nine Alatorre served on the powerful Committee on Ways and Means and in subsequent years was a member of the Committees on Health Labor Relations Employment and Public Services Revenue and Taxation Elections and Reapportionment Criminal Justice Governmental Organization Education Human Resources and Intergovernmental Relations In 1981 he chaired the Assembly Committee on Elections and Reapportionment from which he directed the 1981 assembly reapportionment Upon being elected to the Los Angeles City Council one of his first responsibilities was to redistrict that body as a result of a court action and create a heavily Latino district represented by Councilwoman Gloria Molina from 1987-1991

During his tenure in the assembly Alatorre was the author of landmark legislation in the fields of agricultural labor relations bilingual education prison reform and child care services among other areas In 1983 Alatorre was chairman of the credentials committee for the Democratic National Convention and was a supporter of Michael Dukakis for president He remains an influential figure in Los Angeles city and Mexican-American politics and is considered a prime potential candidate for higher political office

[Session 1 April 29 1989]

[Begin Tape 1 Side A]

VASQUEZ Councilman Alatorre, to [begin] this oral history tell me something about your personal life where you were born and tell me something about your childhood

ALATORRE I was born at the old White Memorial [Medical Center] Hospital which was then on First Street

VASQUEZ In East Los Angeles

ALATORRE On May 15 1943 in Boyle Heights I can remember we lived in Boyle Heights on Rogers [Street] right in back of [the] Bravo Medical Clinic on Soto [Street] for about five or six years My father [José Paz Alatorre] who was born in Juarez Mexico and lived there until the age of thirteen or fourteen [came to] Isleta [Texas] which is right on the border of Juárez in Texas Then he moved to Los Angeles

My grandmother had a fascinating life She died when she was a 105--and more than likely was

about 115 when she died She used to tell me stories about [Francisco] Pancho Villa and the dances and parties that she used to go to

We moved to East Los Angeles where my mother still lives [when I was] about six or seven

VASQUEZ [Did] you live in Texas for a while?

ALATORRE No I didn't My father did I was born and raised in East Los Angeles and I have lived here all my life We moved to where my mother still lives in East Los Angeles [when I was] about six or seven

My father was a repairman for O'Keefe and Merritt [appliances] He worked there before his death for about thirty-some years My father was the only one who was employed My mother was a cosmetologist but my father--being like most Mexican men--felt that my mother's responsibility was to raise the kids

I am one of two children My sister [Cecilia Kunkel] is a year and a half older than I am She is now married and has a couple of kids My mother is María Martinez Alatorre and my father was José Paz Alatorre We were raised in an area that was considered to be gang-ridden

poverty-stricken and the like I went to Belvedere Elementary School Belvedere Junior High School and [James A] Garfield High School My father was a very traditional Mexican man He was the breadwinner of the family

VASQUEZ When you say he was "traditional " what do you mean?

ALATORRE He believed strongly that the man ruled the house My father felt that my mother's responsibility was to raise the family and be home even though she was a cosmetologist I don't think she worked throughout the [entire] time that he was alive I got her a job about fifteen years ago and she worked for a Head Start program in East Los Angeles That was really the only job she has had

VASQUEZ Did she resent that? Not working?

ALATORRE No My mother is a great woman She felt very strongly that her role was to help raise the family to provide for my father She always made my father number one and the family number two Because he worked for such a long period of time I thought we were a rich family I mean relatively speaking The greatest man I ever met

in my life was probably my father He was very wise even with just a seventh-grade education He was very well read very concerned about the world very concerned about the community [He] was never a joiner of any organization or anything but he instilled in us the importance of an education the importance of giving back for what you were given

When I was eighteen years old I was making more money than my father made after working thirty-some years for a manufacturing company That was an absolute shock to me because [he] provided the basic necessities food shelter and clothing

VASQUEZ Culturally were you raised in a very Mexican family?

ALATORRE Yes My grandmother had a lot to do with that

VASQUEZ Did she live with you?

ALATORRE No she lived right across the street and my father every day before he came home would stop and see his mother spend maybe an hour with her then he would come home He did that every day of his life while he was alive

I think the Mexican part of [my upbringing]

came from my grandmother the constant [cultural] reinforcement I mean whatever [Spanish]-language development I had was through my grandmother I went to school speaking relatively little English I spoke Spanish But the [schools] chopped off the Spanish but whatever constant language reinforcement I had came from my grandmother Even though my father would speak Spanish at home he also understood that it was important to learn English

VASQUEZ Were you encouraged to speak English well?

ALATORRE Yes that was important he felt and that was part of the education that I got But I was constantly reinforced in Spanish through my grandmother She never throughout the years of her life spoke English She understood it all She could speak it but I never heard her speak English

VASQUEZ She just refused to?

ALATORRE Yes she absolutely refused to

VASQUEZ Did she ever articulate why?

ALATORRE She felt that Spanish was her language and so long as she understood English she would respond in Spanish You would ask her a question in

English and she would respond to you in Spanish

VASQUEZ Did anyone in your family ever articulate to you the kind of role or profession that you should go into?

ALATORRE My father was the one that constantly reinforced in me the importance of getting an education It was something I [was able to do] To his credit-- as I feel about my kids--whatever I did my father felt that I should be the best at it

I learned very early and to my father's frustration that I wasn't very good with my hands I couldn't even screw in a lightbulb It was very frustrating for me because my father tried to teach me He was very handy around the house He would have me help him I could never do any of it very well He got frustrated but he would also use that as a lesson And the lesson was You can't do any of this stuff I've tried to teach you What you have to do is use the brain that God gave you

I remember when I was about twelve years or thirteen years old--or fourteen no fifteen years old--I had a job because my uncle was a union organizer for the [International

Brotherhood of] Teamsters I got a job at a meat-packing company [Hoffman Packing Company] for the summer and I was working the graveyard shift That was my choice It wasn't that my father ever forced me to do it As a matter of fact he used to take me to work every evening at eleven o'clock

We would talk and it used to break his heart that I would be going to work at eleven o'clock and he would be going home to go to sleep at the same time to get up early in the morning to go to work He told me You don't have to do it " I said 'Yes you're right I don't have to do it It's my choice I have to save money for school clothes and everything else

I think that experience probably reinforced something my father had always instilled in me That is I found out what I didn't want to do the rest of my life Yet I wasn't clear as to what I ultimately did want to do But I knew one thing I didn't want to work with my hands because I wasn't good at it Although I worked from the time that I was a young kid First as a paper boy then I worked at a meat-packing

company loading trucks and being a butcher's helper Then I worked at Sears [Roebuck and Company] as a clerk Then I worked at a jewelry store [Birk's Diamond Company] when I graduated from high school

But I think of my early life as being one of happy years I kind of resented [my father] early on because I didn't understand the strictness of my father as to what time I could come home and everything else I resented that All of the kids that I grew up with were all older than I was I was the youngest

VASQUEZ You grew up in the late fifties and early sixties in a rough part of Los Angeles didn't you? At the dawn of rock 'n' roll and that sort of thing What was your social setting? Were you [ever] in a gang?

ALATORRE Oh yes I was in a gang We started one of the offshoots of El Hoyo [Maravilla] called the Cutdowns

VASQUEZ The Cutdowns?

ALATORRE The Cutdowns yes It was basically three or four of us It was really kind of [for] survival I remember when I was in the sixth

grade a group of guys were after the three of us They got us once and we got them twice That is how it started Because we lived in the area of El Hoyo and I grew up with most of the older guys at El Hoyo We just started it and I got in it yet I wasn't really I didn't stay actively involved in it probably for [more than] three years or four years I knew them all I mean I knew all the [neighborhood] guys

VASQUEZ In your educational experiences were you a good student?

ALATORRE I always got good grades but I also was like a social outcast

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE with those students who got good grades In a class you always have a screwup and I was the one who was the screwup I had some negative experiences As an example I was in an EMR [educationally and mentally retarded] class when I was in the third grade I stuttered and didn't speak English very well I knew I wasn't stupid or dumb To me it was an easy semester but I resented that I resented being used when parents came They would always have me stand up

and read and stuff so that the teachers could show the parents What a good job we're doing with your kids I was told when I was in the sixth grade that I would never make it that I would be in jail by the age of sixteen

VASQUEZ Who told you that?

ALATORRE One of the teachers I had because I was kind of like I obstructed the class and we were constantly fighting and stuff like that I would find a way of not going to school sometimes or be at the nurse's office or the principal's office I knew I wasn't going to go to jail

VASQUEZ What topics interested you in school?

ALATORRE I always liked current events I loved history I loved government Those were probably the two that I loved the most And obviously I loved sports but those were the two I liked When I was in elementary school I used to love to read the weekly reader It was all current events That followed throughout in junior high school My father always read the paper I always was

VASQUEZ English- or Spanish-language paper?

ALATORRE English The [Los Angeles] Herald Examiner and

the [Los Angeles] Daily Mirror only because I delivered it So he would read that He read I would imagine the La Opinión He would read that because he would bring it home for my grandmother So I'm sure he read that

In junior high school by the time I got there I was only Actually one semester and all my friends graduated so I felt kind of lonely All my friends were already going to high school I was very popular I was always involved in student government I was a class officer student body president Every semester I was in student council in junior high school In junior high school I spent a lot of time bending over getting swatted because I was somewhat disruptive Yet even as disruptive as I may have been I always got good grades And that really got teachers mad because they wanted a reason to throw me out of the class We were tracked as most kids were during that time and I was in

VASQUEZ Explain tracking for those who [might not] understand it

ALATORRE Tracking is supposedly a result of tests that are

given you You were basically put in a track depending on where you fell in that test which was culturally and linguistically biased I don't even know how well I did in the test I think I got better grades I did well in the test so consequently I was always in the academically motivated track that was going to go on to college and the like I always felt [like] an oddball in those classes because there were very few kids in there that I could relate to People that I could relate to were primarily guys that messed up in school

VASQUEZ How early did you decide that you were going to go to college?

ALATORRE I think initially that decision was made by my father But then I made the decision myself by the time that I was in the tenth grade

VASQUEZ Who was the most influential in your life?

ALATORRE My father without a doubt probably the man that impacted my life more than anybody else Like most kids growing up we would eat at a certain time and during that time we would have discussions Somewhere along the way I learned from him because [through] osmosis It set

in but I never had the patience I used to eat fast just to get out and go upstairs or listen to some music It was always under the guise of doing my homework which wasn't the [most] motivating reason My father was very strict He was very rigid in what he would accept and what he wouldn't accept

VASQUEZ What were his politics?

ALATORRE Oh very liberal A very liberal Democrat Very socially conscious He knew that people were getting screwed I mean he taught me that how [our] society was an unjust society and how the only way that that was going to [make] change [was] by getting more people elected in office more people educated so that we could take control of our own lives Basically our lives were controlled by somebody else

VASQUEZ Did he say who that somebody else was?

ALATORRE It was always some white boy somewhere He didn't do it bitterly I think he was bitter but it didn't come across He did it more to show us why we had to do [things] for ourselves and why we needed an education He wouldn't tolerate me screwing off in school or anything else He

would kick my ass if I did that He did it a few times when I was caught It was a typical [upbringing] Be respectful of authority respectful of teachers be well educated They know better " His job he felt was that if I screwed off he would straighten me out real quick

You know we had corporal punishment [in school] One time [however] it was abused One day my father went to school and said You never touch my son If he does something wrong you let me know and I'll take care of it But that is not your job

VASQUEZ So then you went on to college?

ALATORRE I went to high school and to me high school was a joke I really dropped out in the tenth grade In my mind it was an absolute waste of time I would have preferred going right into college because it was a joke

VASQUEZ What high school was this again?

ALATORRE I went to Garfield High School I was student body president a student body officer the whole time I was at Garfield This gave me the [opportunity] to get away with whatever I could

get away with I learned how to play the game so well I knew how to bullshit the teachers and knew which ones I had to do it with I got good grades I used students to do my homework primarily girls

Here again I was in classes where I couldn't relate to anybody They were squares as far as I was concerned I could relate to guys playing sports guys who were in gangs I always had a relationship with that element But I had the grades I could have gone to any school that I wanted But I had a fundamental problem I could never test well I even had a hard time getting my transcripts sent to [California State University] Cal State L A

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE Teachers said that I was going to drop out and that they were doing me a favor by encouraging me to go to junior college I couldn't read well I would end up dropping out That I was better off in junior college Because I was student body president I went to the principal and told him They didn't send my grades They didn't send my transcripts I said I would report them

and they would get into trouble So they were pretty much forced to do it

VASQUEZ Did you go to junior college though?

ALATORRE No I never went to junior college I'll give you another example about how much teachers were resentful [toward] me I was very popular in school and got good grades But to give you an example of how mean teachers could be how mean spirited when the Ephebians [honor society] were selected I should have been an Ephebian They are selected by the teachers The day that they brought in the people who were nominated and were to speak before the school--people were supposed to have been told by teachers the day before-- they never told me I went to play a basketball game at Huntington Park High School

The following day I showed up in school and I remember my coach telling me How come you didn't show up this morning? I said Show up for what? He said 'They really said some real negative things about you ' I said What for? He said 'The people who were nominated for Ephebians were interviewed by the faculty " I said "Nobody even told me " He told me,

That's chicken shit You have to do something about it

So I went to the sponsor of the society I told him why [I didn't attend] and they said that they had notified me I asked them "Why would they notify me in fifth period? How could that have happened I was traveling to Huntington Park High School? Why didn't you tell my coach? Well it was an accident Then I went all the way down the line Basically they just said It's too bad It's your fault

That is an example I was very bitter about that because nobody deserved it more than I did Not only did I have the grades that qualified me but nobody was involved more with the student body and the community than I was

VASQUEZ What were some of the issues among the student body and in the community at that time?

ALATORRE It was basically a very dormant community Drop-outs were a real issue but there was no real social activism per se during that period of time Whatever the school did [it was because] they knew better

VASQUEZ This was very early in the 1960s right?

ALATORRE Yes I graduated in 1961 Whatever problems we had it was our fault not their fault The students by and large went along I mean I was the only one [who questioned that] To give you an example of how I was censored every time there was an assembly, I had to go to the principal and tell him what I was going to say at the assembly I never did it because they could never find me I would just show up to the assembly

 The reason they did that was because the first student assembly that I was student body president I just shit all over the teachers [saying] that they weren't doing their job and everything else The principal had me in his office and said I did not have the right to do that What right did I have to criticize the teachers'? I said Well tell me where I'm wrong? And they couldn't tell me where I was wrong From that point on I was pretty much censored I wasn't a social misfit but I had a mouth and freely expressed what I felt

VASQUEZ What was the composition of the student body at the time?

ALATORRE Ninety-five percent Chicanos and 5 percent others--Asians some Armenians and some whites Until I attended Cal State L A I knew nothing of what it was like to go to school with anybody else but Chicanos And I'll tell you something My first day at Cal State L A was an absolute culture shock

VASQUEZ Tell me about that First of all why did you decide to go to Cal State L A ?

ALATORRE Because I didn't want to go to a junior college and Cal State L A was close to me I didn't have a car I could commute Cal State L A was like Harvard to me and to anybody else [from Garfield High School] I think in our graduating class of about four hundred or five hundred there were only four of us that went to a four-year school The rest either worked or went to East L A College

 First day I went there I remember I took the bus and showed up at Cal State L A I remember everything was really going well for the first three classes The last class I had I had with Hal Fishman who is now the news commentator--and TV anchorman--at [KTLA] Channel 5

VASQUEZ He was teaching in the political science department?

ALATORRE Yes exactly He was a misfit amongst professors He drove a Corvette and [it was] a bright son of a gun You know what first days in college are like 'Here's what we're going to do Here are the books This is what the class is about Class dismissed ' He got in and he got in a little late He said Here are the books I want you to read Pick them up after class This is what we are going to do in the class Then he started talking about government Now I was good in government In the tests and everything I was always scoring in the 90s or 80 percentile and the like It was the only subject area that I did well in because most of the time I would not even read the test I would just mark it off and I wouldn't be bothered because I couldn't relate to anything that it was talking about anyway Then he started going around the class asking questions Man when I was in school I sat in the back When I was in college I sat in the back I always tried to find whoever it was

the fattest [student] so I would get lost so that nobody would ever ask me questions

Well he got to me We were talking about communism Shit the only thing I remember studying about that was that Karl Marx wrote the Communist Manifesto That was about the sum and substance of the knowledge I had I remember that after that class I felt stupid I was just blown away by how smart these kids were It was Government 150 or whatever Most of them were freshmen so it wasn't that you had sophomores or juniors or seniors in there

VASQUEZ Was it how much they knew or how well they expressed it?

ALATORRE Oh I don't know how much they knew but they expressed it very well I was taking the bus home and I remember saying to myself I ain't coming back That experience blew me away First of all that whole day man I didn't see a Chicano I saw blacks Blacks I could relate to because I looked at them just like me louder and everything else But shit man I said Goddamn I felt so inferior so insecure and this went on So that day I remember telling my

father how I felt He quickly hammered home that that is bullshit and everything else You're better than they are and the like Man I was on and off the whole week And Friday the last class was Fishman's class I felt just as stupid by Friday as I did on Monday because it [the class] was Monday Wednesday and Friday I just said to myself I don't know if I'm coming back on Monday ' It tore me up I said Man I can't relate to them I don't know anybody They are all smarter than I am and the like The whole weekend I remember I was just bummed I was ambivalent And I just remember what my father used to tell me Hey you are better and you can't let people dictate your life

So I made up my mind that it would take me longer to study than others which I resented but I just made up my mind [to do it] It took me three hours to study what somebody else could study for one hour I was going to put the three hours in So I had to learn discipline and apportioning of my time I'll tell you something In between classes I was in the

library Lunchtime I would just run get
something eat by myself and run to the
library I did it not just because I needed to
study but I did it because I always felt
Gee what do the other people think? Here's a
guy by himself Gee I feel sorry for this poor
fuck ' You know what I mean? I never wanted
somebody to say that about me That was another
reason why I would do it But I made up my
mind Hey fuck it " I was going to do it come
hell or high water And I did it

VASQUEZ Were there any instructors there that you
identified with?

ALATORRE No not one I didn't meet I didn't know
instructors until I took out this woman [Patricia
Trainer] I didn't know anybody I couldn't
relate to anybody instructors or otherwise I
used to go to school with this friend of mine
[Andrew] Andy Camacho He went to Cal State
L A but he was already a junior I was just a
freshman but if I saw him once a day I was
lucky Sometimes I never saw him He would
take me [to school] and I had to take the bus
home after that Man I hated that school for a

while because I knew nobody

VASQUEZ So you were there for four years?

ALATORRE I was there for four and a half years because I got married I went to school full-time with the exception of one semester I took one class and that was right after I had gotten married I thought I was going to die I thought I wasn't going to make it through school

VASQUEZ In what year did you get married?

ALATORRE I got married a year and a half after I was at Cal State L A The first semester I was working full-time I had to because my wife [Stella Daniels] never worked throughout the time that we were married So I took one class because I had to get a full-time job So I was working in downtown L A and I could only take one class It was the history of Mexico I thought I was going to die

VASQUEZ Who did you take that class with?

ALATORRE It was a lefty guy that ended up The guy that started the mariachi

VASQUEZ [Timothy F] Tim Harding

ALATORRE Yes Tim Harding I took the class with him I remember the day that I took the final I said

to myself I'm never going to make it this way " So I went to the financial aid office I found out about a student loan I took out a student loan and I decided that I was going to go to school full-time So it took me four and a half years to get out of Cal State L A I worked sixty hours a week and went to school full-time

VASQUEZ Where did you work? What kinds of things did you do?

ALATORRE I worked at Birk's Diamond Company I started off as a credit clerk and I ended up being the credit manager of one of their stores See they understood They allowed me the flexibility of going to school full-time so I would start maybe at 8 00 in the morning then I would go to work maybe at 11 30 then I would work until 9 00 seven days a week It was rough times It was rough times First of all I didn't want to get married but those things happen

VASQUEZ Your wife's name was what?

ALATORRE Stella Daniels a Chicana She went to high school with me She went to junior high school with me and went to high school with me I had two kids right off the bat [Derrick Joseph

Alatorre and Darrell Joseph Alatorre] Here it was Let me just tell you about that

The day that my oldest son was born was the same day my father died It was devastating for me Really devastating for me My father was never able to see my kids my oldest son It was 6 00 in the morning [when] my son was born My father couldn't be there My mother would have been there but my father was already sick At 9 00 I was at my mom's and my dad's house My dad was sick and excited for me about my son He was always counseling me It didn't matter The man was dying and he was telling me why it was that much more important for me to finish school That was the thing he feared the most that I would not finish school And [he told me] how now I had an added responsibility of a child and how important that responsibility was I hadn't slept for a couple of days I always had a kid around finals time But that's the way it was My dad told me Go home and go to bed You need some sleep I said I'm going to stay with you in case you need to go to the doctor He said "I'll be fine I remember going home

and just falling asleep

My mother called me and said You have to take your dad to the hospital The doctor told him he has to go in ' So I took him Just very vivid in my mind before he left I took him to my grandmother's to his mother's He sat down there He was basically dying I'm going to die and I want you to know I want you to take care of my wife and look after her I'm going to be all right Don't worry about me He had a glass of wine with her He told my mother before he went to my grandmother's that while he was in the hospital he wanted my mother to look after my grandmother While I was driving up to the hospital he was telling me about school and telling me about being a father He was dying to see my kid and the things that we were going to do together I got him there and they no sooner rolled him into the bed that he had his first heart attack It was a fucking mindblower He stabilized They had him on oxygen and everything else I knew he was all right because he was pinching the nurse on the ass and kidding around So he told me Why don't you go home?

Have you eaten? I said No no He said

Why don't you get something to eat? I went to get something to eat and when I came back--I was walking into the room--he had his last heart attack and he died

You have to understand that the Christmas before was the first time that I was ever able to sit down as an equal as a man with him and let him know 'What you taught me has done me well Don't worry I'm a man regardless of the circumstances I accept my responsibility School is too important to me and you don't have to worry about that He was already sick and talking about things that we were going to do together We spent like four hours together Everybody was pissed off and everything else because we just sat in the corner and talked We had never done that before Very resentful Very resentful for I mean I'll be very honest with you I've been very resentful until recently It had a tremendous impact on my life You know never really completely accepting his death

VASQUEZ What year was that?

ALATORRE My son is now

VASQUEZ Derrick

ALATORRE Yeah Derrick is now twenty-five years old It was April 15 [1964] So twenty-five years ago my father died I had a lot of guilt about that

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE I was with him when he first got sick We were working on the yard There were two or three things that I did in my life that just aggravated it One time I got into a gang fight My father found out about it He got sick because he was so worried about me Then the circumstances about my marriage was the other one You know just getting married all of a sudden and him not understanding it--the fear and everything else So to an extent I felt guilty about that even though I know that I had nothing to do with it because it was something congenital as we found out Six months later I found out that the doctor had told him that he had to stop work and if he didn't he would die He chose to work and he chose to die because as he said "I'm going to die anyway I'll die from not working so I choose to do it

this way

VASQUEZ What was the impact on the family?

ALATORRE Well my father was obviously the only man of the family immediate and extended It was fascinating My family was matriarchal The women ran it all I'm the only man left in the family because the rest of them [women] just run it It is very devastating For my mother it was a great loss Obviously it was a great loss to me and a great loss to everyone It was the beginning of a cycle because my grandmother outlived all of her sons Her first son [Mariano Alatorre] died when he had TB [tuberculosis] My father died of a heart attack and a year later my uncle [Antonio Alatorre] died--her other son--of cancer She outlived all of her sons She outlived her grandson [John Benítez] who died in an automobile accident It was a real shock Obviously a great shock to me but like I said my father was king

[End of Tape 1 Side A]

[Begin Tape 1 Side B]

VASQUEZ Tell me about your decision to go to graduate school, into public administration

ALATORRE I see what you have this for my professional

Let me tell you I hated what I was doing when I was going to school but to me it was a means to an end

VASQUEZ In credit?

ALATORRE I mean I was so good at it that I could do it with my eyes closed It was a family business So I learned a lot about Jews [and the] business ethic that they had

VASQUEZ What kind of things? Can you talk about that?

ALATORRE The family The only people that shared in it was the family Shrewd businessmen Took chances when nobody else was willing to take chances The reason being he knew what I knew and that was that Chicanos are basically honest They always pay their bills When nobody else would give them credit he would And the only time when they didn't pay was when they were out of work or they were so overloaded as most Mexicanos would have been because of big families They would overload them because they had too many bills but they always paid their bills They may pay it instead of ten dollars they would pay five dollars [but] they would

always pay I learned how cutthroat that business [was] I mean they never liked me to sell, because I would tell people not to buy That they were stupid for buying some of those things You know how material things were so important to us--rings--stuff that weren't a necessity and how they could do that I got

Their daughter and I became good friends We would always protect each other Towards the end I started hating it

I knew I was graduating so I was doing this paper I met [Philip] Phil M6nchez He was the executive director of the Foundation for Mexican-American Studies Pretty much out of that office we ran everything We had a Head Start program the first bilingual Head Start program Out of that office we ran the Association of Mexican-American Educators of which I was one of the founders Here I was just graduating from college and I got involved in it

VASQUEZ Was this volunteer work?

ALATORRE I volunteered for about two months then I got a job I wrote a proposal That proposal got

funded and from that I created my own job

VASQUEZ Which was?

ALATORRE Which was as the director of the Educational Resource Program of the Teen Post of Southern California I had three hundred teachers working for me that provided cultural enrichment programs for these Teen Post programs--tutorial programs and everything else I met Phil M6nchez I remember going into his office I was taking this class with this guy he absolutely hated I waited He was late He got there absentminded and everything else I said "Hi I'm Richard Alatorre " He said "Look what the shit do I care? So that kind of blew me away Then I told him what I was doing He said How do I know you're not a spy? I hate that miserable this and that " I said "Hey I'm trying to get a goddamn grade out of this I don't love the guy either " So we just hit it off Our personalities just kind of clicked

I was there to interview him about the Head Start program how it got started I was doing a paper on it We spent about two or three hours Then he said "What do you think of this

idea? Have you heard of it? The Teen Post?
No I didn't know anything about it He said
Well basically this is what the Teen Posts
do I have this idea What would you do with
this idea?' So I gave him some ideas So he
said Why don't you write them down? He said
"Why don't you take a week and why don't you
write what you would do with this and bring it
back to me? I said All right So a week
later I brought it back to him He said Ah
you're not bad He had [Charles] Charlie
Erickson So Charlie Erickson then put down the
idea in English and submitted it It got funded
and he told me "How would you like to be the
director of this? I said What? A director of
what? Shit I have just graduated from
school " He said "Don't worry about it Why
don't you become the director of it? Why don't
you write in the budget? Eight hundred dollars a
month That was a lot of money at that time I
became the director of it

We had just founded the Association [of
Mexican-American Educators] Phil was the
president Then there was this other association

of school administrators out of Los Angeles with all of the vendidos in the world and they wanted to take it over Then we elected the next president of the foundation which was Marco De León the founder--the godfather--of bilingual education and bilingualism He is the kind of an intellectual guy and everything else So I was into that

Then we were fighting Opal Jones with the NAPP Program the Neighborhood Adult Participation Program I mean that is how I got my baptism into Chicano affairs And this was before anybody was doing any of these stuff Yet I was fortunate because here I was twenty-some years old and I was in the middle of it In a year I got an education that some people never got in their lifetime So that was my first job

VASQUEZ Tell me a little bit about the fight with Opal Jones

ALATORRE It was basically with blacks It was a poverty program Blacks were the only ones who should have everything and Mexicans should It was like a constant battle Anytime that a program

started blacks would take it over and never wanted to share it with anybody else I had a great relationship with blacks because all the other students in college that I had ever related to were blacks I hung around with blacks There weren't any Chicanos and I always had a great relationship with them I used to say This is not the way it should be I'm not trying to take [anything] away from you but how about us?" It was a real bitter bitter fight Because we were becoming a real threat--not me-- but it was really Phil They went after him They put the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] on him and in the process they went after me because I was there They went after my livelihood and my right to make money

VASQUEZ In what way did they do that?

ALATORRE You know pretty much trying to blackball me from getting a job But I was fortunate because right before the full onslaught it was time to move I had just got in from I got a job with the county

VASQUEZ With whom?

ALATORRE With the county of Los Angeles with the

Department of Community Services and Human Relations Commission Pretty much for about a year Phil didn't have a job We were just big mouths We were the "militants of the day They considered us dangerous So not only were the blacks after us but then there was the natural [conflict] with Chicanos so they wanted to make sure that we never saw the light of day But I got one

Then it took Phil a year before anybody would even talk to him The foundation kept on going because we had a couple of projects that we got funded on a few studies So I was just relating to Phil in between the time I was working and the like and we were still involved with the Association of Mexican-American Educators We won the next fight for the presidency of it The Council of Mexican-American Affairs which was the delegate agency for the Head Start program We were fighting with them I kind of spent about nine months with the county Then we got a program funded called the Social Action Training Center in between the time I went to the Saul Alinsky

school of community organization [Industrial Areas Foundation]

VASQUEZ How did you find out about that?

ALATORRE Saul Alinsky I met him one night at a garage in Santa Fe Springs I tripped out on the guy I had read about him My disagreement with him was that he never believed that you could ever organize people around ethnicity His was [hot] on social issues We spent half the night fighting about that I tripped out so he invited me I went through his school

VASQUEZ What did that do for you?

ALATORRE It gave me skills in dealing with people I had skills but I didn't know what to do with them and how to get the most out of people So I did that We basically hired fifteen Chicano gang members and fifteen black gang members Walter Bremond Ron [Maulana] Karenga and myself got together with John Davis from the 'SC [University of Southern California] School of Medicine I forget what he does but he was a Ph D He was the only one who had an education at that time beyond undergraduate school So I was in charge of the Chicanos and Bremond was in charge of the

blacks

VASQUEZ What were the objectives?

ALATORRE The objective was to try to turn their negative energies into positive because they were already identified as being leaders in the gangs So we wanted to try and redirect their energies and train them in the organizations

VASQUEZ When was this?

ALATORRE In 1966 1967? Probably late 1967 The first thing we did with them after we hired them was to go to Fresno I remember driving up on one of worst rainy days We got to Fresno and we dumped them in the middle of fucking Fresno and told them All right motherfuckers survive
[Laughter]

VASQUEZ What was the objective of that?

ALATORRE Simple The whole idea was for them to come together as a cohesive unit The idea was them against us Well because they were so into themselves and everything else they didn't get it We left them there at three o'clock in the morning and we said We'll pick you up at about three o'clock in the afternoon Try and get a job as day laborers in the camps Man they

got pissed off and they didn't get it

See I always had a good relationship with the kids so everyone was playing hard-ass with them I met with them They were [saying] Who the shit do you think you are? They looked at me as being one of them I told them What is it that you learned?" They answered You guys are a bunch of chicken shits this and that

What did you learn? They didn't get it They were just all over the place

I told them Look it man I'm going to propose to you and put it in a language I think you understand Thirty guys [Gestures with opposing hands] Five guys How many of you guys have gotten into a gang fight man? What do you think would happen? We'd beat the living

" I said Precisely But you guys are caught up all over the place So long as you are caught all over the place five guys are going to kill you They said Oh yeah I said I'll leave it in your hands So about two hours later they came They selected a delegation They came and said These are our demands So we told them Now you are ready So we started

training And, you know it worked I've seen some of the guys Some have done well Other guys have died But the whole idea was to channel them in their respective communities into community organizing and doing things

VASQUEZ At the grass roots level?

ALATORRE Yes at the grass roots level So I did that Then I got the Ford Foundation Fellowship

VASQUEZ This is before you started 'SC?

ALATORRE Oh yes The Ford Foundation Fellowship afforded me the opportunity to go to 'SC It was an internship program That's when I first got The first part of the internship I spent it on [Thomas] Tom Bradley's first campaign

VASQUEZ How did you become aware of this internship program?

ALATORRE It was drafted by Mervyn [M] Dymally Merv and I had become friends through Phil Montez When the internship program was funded Merv--because it was Chicanos and blacks--approached me to see if I was interested I said 'Yes " It provided me a stipend I forget what it was

VASQUEZ So it was a separate program from what had been there before started by [Assemblyman] Allen

Miller?

ALATORRE Oh way way before This was a forerunner to it The first part of the six months was with Bradley's campaign the last six months was with [Assemblyman] Walter [J] Karabian In between that the mandate was yet to go to school full-time

VASQUEZ Tell me about your experience working for Walter Karabian as an intern

ALATORRE He was a friend of mine I had ran his campaign before

VASQUEZ When was this?

ALATORRE I worked on his first campaign in 1966 and in 1968 I ran his campaign So it was kind of like when I was going out with his administrative assistant [Carol Marks] So pretty much it was I did anything I wanted I did constituent work

VASQUEZ How did he come to get you to run his campaign?

ALATORRE He was a young guy and I kind of tripped out He was a young guy smart and everything else He knew that Chicanos were the ones who ultimately were the balance of power in electing him

VASQUEZ In the Forty-fifth [Assembly District]

ALATORRE In the Forty-fifth yes So I had met him
Then somewhere along the way after he got
elected I met his administrative assistant and I
started bullshitting with her This was during
[Senator Robert F] Bobby Kennedy's campaign He
asked me to run the registration program It was
Frontlash which was an A Phillip Randolph
Institute offshoot They ran a registration
program probably the most successful one Then
he had the general election and I ran his
general election campaign So that is how I
ended up Pretty much he let me do whatever I
wanted to

VASQUEZ So after that you became an intern

ALATORRE After that Then right toward the end of the
thing then I met a woman [Jean Fairfax] who was
the director of the community service component
with the NAACP [National Association for the
Advancement of Colored People] Legal Defense
Fund I had done some stuff on the freedom
rides' and shit like that They were interested
in coming west or they knew that if the NAACP
came west they would have to take in a whole new

dimension which [included] looking at Hispanics

VASQUEZ There was an NAACP here?

ALATORRE In New York

VASQUEZ There was nothing here?

ALATORRE It was the Legal Defense Fund It was just the NAACP This is a totally different thing They housed that at New York

VASQUEZ The Legal Defense Fund?

ALATORRE So I met her in Texas And I was a young kid but I had a great gift for bullshit It was like we were walking and she was interviewing me And she offered me a job to set up the western regional office for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund My job was not only to set the office up but my job was to do all the backbone work for the class-action lawsuits that the NAACP would be involved in I'm talking a great legal mess Vilma [Martínez] was back in New York working as a legal counsel with the NAACP That was kind of like the beginning It was Reyes [Lopez] Tijerina It was Corky [Gonzalez] It was César [Chavez] with the marches in Texas and lower Rio Grande Valley

VASQUEZ What did that do for your perception of what your

possibilities were in this field? There was a mass movement coming up

ALATORRE I was involved in all the mass movements It was before they became mass movements One thing on hand was I knew I could put people together and the like I had this resource that nobody else had

VASQUEZ Which was?

ALATORRE I had all these attorneys and I had funds that we could file lawsuits against them Then as we went [into the] Southwest what basically you got from all these lawyers and everything else is that the NAACP was fine but we should have our own so I did groundwork to set up MALDEF [Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund]

VASQUEZ With Pete Tijerina?

ALATORRE Yes with Pete Tijerina exactly It was Pete with lawyers and people from the Southwest That's the way MALDEF was started I mean not a lot of people know about that but that is the way it was started

VASQUEZ What was the thinking at the time? To build something like the NAACP was then?

ALATORRE Absolutely Why should they do it? Why can't we
do it? Jean Fairfax was the director of the
NAACP She was involved in integration at one of
the universities She was the director She
never understood Chicanos or anything else

VASQUEZ She must have understood something?

ALATORRE She understood that the reality was she couldn't
do it on her own I've got to get to a meeting
at the Department of Water and Power Now do
you want to stop ?

[End Tape 1 Side B]

[Session 2 May 31 1989]

[Begin Tape 2 Side A]

VASQUEZ Councilman Alatorre the last time that we talked we were discussing your childhood in East Los Angeles There is something that I would like to go back on and recap and that is your perception of discrimination or racism against the Mexican community in Los Angeles What was your perception at that time?

ALATORRE Well we had no elected representatives to speak of with the exception of [Congressman Edward R] Ed Roybal which was vague in my recollection

VASQUEZ But you were aware of that as a young man?

ALATORRE Oh yes oh yes We had nobody representing us It always fascinated me And that is when I think in the back of my mind I remember when I was graduating my dream in life was to eventually represent East Los Angeles where I grew up

VASQUEZ How early do you remember having that idea?

ALATORRE Probably in the twelfth grade I used to read the local newspaper the throwaway sheet That was my link to what was happening in the community not exactly the greatest information piece What was fascinating was their editorial policy I saw this when I was in college more than I did growing up in junior high or high school It was always the opposite of what the community voted They would always endorse Republican candidates Who would always lose By and large their editorial policy wasn't reactionary per se but it was pretty close to it So it really wasn't exactly the most reflective newspaper that really echoed the concerns of the community

VASQUEZ Are these what used to be known as the Kovner Publications?

ALATORRE It was both the Kovner Publications That was radical yet Kovner was more Democratic but the Belvedere Citizen which was owned by the Northeast Newspapers [Oren Asa] owned all the local newspapers the throwaway newspapers You know Belvedere Citizen Edward Diaz who was kind of like the front guy But it always amazed

how it was so reactionary It always supported Republicans I think Roybal was about the only one they ever supported as a Democrat until probably recently but given their choice it would always lean towards Republicans But you know to my recollection we had no representatives

My father used to impress upon me how we were so far behind in terms of our politics in terms of our representation I remember him telling me something about gerrymandering and how basically they would keep us politically impotent And it was the whole thing I saw when I got into politics The whole idea was you never wanted them [voters] educated in the primary This was the Democratic perspective But you sure as hell wanted to register them in the general [but] you never wanted them registered in the primary because they became a threat to you So all Chicanos were good for was determining the election of somebody but never electing their own So they were great for Democrats and that is why they cut them up It is kind of like everybody got a piece and they knew

that that piece was all gold because they would vote

VASQUEZ Democrat?

ALATORRE Yes

VASQUEZ To what did you attribute this disenfranchisement at that time?

ALATORRE I felt that a lot of the people running for office weren't worth a damn We fielded people who were They were like ringers They were never going to get elected And it really came home to me I remember this one election that I was involved in As a matter of fact it was during the [Robert] Kennedy campaign you know during the student walkouts when Richard Calderón ran for the state senate

What was amazing to me was that the only people he [Calderón] felt comfortable talking to were the people he already had He never ventured out to talk with the white boys because somewhere along the way either he felt so insecure or inferior that he was afraid to and consequently he only talked to himself It was candidates like that I mean this guy should have been elected

VASQUEZ I worked for him twice [in campaigns]

ALATORRE Yes I worked for him more than [that] As
a matter of fact we worked together on Broadway
[Avenue] across from Lincoln High School That
was the senate race I worked with him on a
couple of races but Here was a guy that
was our hope And here was a guy that was afraid
to go and talk to anybody else but Mexicans And
he even had a hard time talking with Mexicans
So I think a lot of it was our own [fault]
I think number one we saw ourselves We
didn't see the political process being that
important Yes we can get together and get
turned on to the idea of electing somebody but
most of the time we ran such politically impotent
campaigns It wasn't a question of manpower We
had the manpower but we never had the money to
get our message out And then you would see the
[Philip L] Phil Sotos of the world You would
see the Oh one other guy I can't

VASQUEZ John Moreno?

ALATORRE John Moreno And of course John Moreno had his
own problem He was probably the smartest of all
of them John Moreno was a brilliant man but he

basically fought the odds He won the skirmish
and lost the battle

VASQUEZ What is your assessment of Phil Soto and John
Moreno? They were the first Chicanos in the
twentieth century elected to the assembly

ALATORRE I think John Moreno probably had the most potent-
ial but I think he was smarter than Phil But
they both were lazy Phil was basically lazy
Nell [Soto] was the one who pretty much had the
brains And she is tougher than shit man I
have a lot of respect for her a lot of respect
for her Phil was probably the biggest disap-
pointment because I think he is basically
lazy There was no reason in the world for him
to have lost but he lost and he lost on his own

VASQUEZ He attributes his loss to the Rumford Fair
Housing Act and the reactions to it

ALATORRE I think the other [reason] is that he basically
didn't do his homework He was basically too
lazy He fell in love with Sacramento Same
thing with Moreno He [Moreno] just loved women
and loved to party But I think Phil was just
basically lazy and he became very cocky

VASQUEZ Do you think that his association--which seemed

to be growing before he left office--with
[Speaker of the Assembly] Jesse [M] Unruh made
him feel too secure?

ALATORRE Probably Jesse was smart enough Jesse
recognized that second to blacks Chicanos were
the future You know Jesse was a cold-blooded
political animal He demanded discipline That
is when you had discipline Nobody rocked the
boat If you rocked the boat you were out in
left field somewhere Both of them--but to a
greater extent Phil--was just an absolute
disappointment And I think sure fair housing
had something to do with it but that was more
abstract I think not doing his homework was
probably

VASQUEZ In what sense? His organization?

ALATORRE I think not taking care of business It is easy
to go to Sacramento and fall in love with the
four walls around you because man you're a
god And unless you've seen the top and the
bottom--and from that hopefully you'll develop
some balance--he just saw 'I was moving up ' and
it was easier to be up there than it was down
here I think Nell was a lot more political

She understood more of the nuts and bolts of it than Phil Phil is a naturally cocky guy For not having very much you would think that he has the world by the balls

VASQUEZ What is your assessment of the impact that the formation of MAPA [Mexican-American Political Association] as a result of the 1958 statewide Democratic campaign had for the first crop of candidates which included Soto?

ALATORRE MAPA was [started with] the idea of [being] non-partisan The whole nonpartisan thing I thought was kind of stupid Even though everybody knew it was Democratic it stayed basically in the control of [Enrique Hank] Quevedo Then it was transferred to Bert Corona Then Bert was out and Bert's guy I forget what his name was He got indicted for peddling dope

VASQUEZ Abe Tapia?

ALATORRE Abe Tapia They became, you know It was like Hey give me \$10 000 and I'll deliver the Chicano community

VASQUEZ They became brokers?

ALATORRE That's all it was [But] only brokers for themselves, for a few not for the

organization I remember taking MAPA on when we started the Young Citizens for Governor Brown in 1966 for his [second reelection] campaign It was David Ochoa and myself We both had the rhetoric and Bert had all the Shit it flowed--I mean charismatic as hell It is just that we didn't We knew no boundaries so consequently we would do crazy things and we worked and all they did was give X amount I mean it was known as "Give me X amount of dollars and I'll deliver the endorsement Jesse Unruh used to laugh at that when he found out what it was all about They tried to do it in [1968] with Bobby Kennedy The 'old man did it for some of the other campaigns and unfortunately it became

VASQUEZ What 'old man?

ALATORRE The old man Quevedo It basically just became
It became an old-[style] patronage mill

VASQUEZ But no building of any organization?

ALATORRE I think even today some of the strongest chapters come out of the San Joaquin Valley Fresno is always very very active

VASQUEZ Why is that?

ALATORRE They were hungrier They understood
 oppression They understood who the man was
 We were all over the place here Basically
 Chicanos in Los Angeles have always had it easy
 easier than others To a great extent we really
 haven't understood the whole concept of being
 oppressed of really hurting of the need for
 organization Organization was just a vehicle to
 be in a political campaign You know Bert
 always insisted on that He started with that
 view in the [Robert] Kennedy thing [presidential
 campaign] It was just a vehicle to [get]
 money Jesse told me [about] some of the monies
 that were paid to the Bert Coronas for en-
 dorsements and everything else It wasn't with
 the mindset of spreading it around It was just
 having it concentrated--old man Quevedo with his
 family and his lackeys and Bert Corona with
 his And that is all there ever was

VASQUEZ Would you identify this as political personalism?

ALATORRE Oh sure very much so

VASQUEZ Another area that we were talking about last time
 had to do with your work in the civil rights
 movement Draw for me a mental picture if you

will of the civil rights movement as you saw it emerging in the early and mid-sixties in Los Angeles

ALATORRE I remember laying down in front of a truck with Dolores Huerta [United Farm Workers Organizing Committee] one time I was praying to God that if the truck wasn't going to stop that it would hit her first You know I didn't know anything Fortunately the truck stopped For me the civil rights movement was I always viewed it as a means It was greater than just blacks To me it was us too Even though there was a great deal of resentment later on especially during the EYOA [Economic Youth Opportunity Agency] days--that meant later on--you know We're the ones who did this and you're just riding on our coattails

VASQUEZ Was this blacks talking?

ALATORRE Blacks talking by and large The poverty days were Blacks were very matriarchal The power was with the women It is amazing that the directors of most of the programs were women Opal Jones the directors of the Teen Post Program were women You know most of the

spokespeople Yes there were some men
But by and large the doers were women There
was a great deal of resentment Most of the
people were more intimidated by the blacks

Here again I was too young to be
intimidated I didn't know intimidation I
mean I always believe and I still do I'm not
interested in taking away from you I just want
a piece of the action But in my getting a piece
of the action if I get a piece of the action
don't come and want to get mine I'll respect
yours Just respect mine There wasn't that
reciprocity with many blacks Some of them
understood it I think Mervyn Dynally was
probably the one that understood it more than
anybody else

VASQUEZ Why do you think that is?

ALATORRE I think he had the vision He had vision enough
to recognize that And I think he believed
it Certainly blacks were the most important
but when he did talk about minorities he talked
other than blacks When others talked about
minorities they meant black and black alone I
think Merv was probably one of the first to

really understand that much more so than most other blacks that I ever came in contact with

VASQUEZ How about people like Walter Bremond?

ALATORRE Bremond and I wrote the first proposal for the Social Action Training Center using Saul Alinsky's methods of community organization Identifying gang members from the black and Chicano communities and trying to use the natural leadership abilities that they had as gang leaders and turn it around into constructive things--in working for community issues

VASQUEZ Since you were brought up around gangs there was a question I wanted to ask you since you belonged to a gang What in your estimation is the reason for that? Why do young people [join gangs] ?

ALATORRE Either you learn how to run or you learn how to fight If you really can't identify with anything you can always identify with a group of guys We started the Cutdowns from El Hoyo as a means of self-survival This guy Richard Márquez Dickeybird was the founder of the Cutdowns And Leonard Castellanos an artist and myself we grew up together We were

constantly being jumped by these two or three guys So finally we just got tired and said "To hell with it ' We all live either on top of the hill at El Hoyo or down at El Hoyo So the guys that we knew were guys from El Hoyo So we started the Cutdowns from El Hoyo And it was recognition It didn't start out necessarily as an idea of a gang It just ended up that way

VASQUEZ Are gangs in the Mexican parts of Los Angeles at least as antisocial as they are projected in the media?

ALATORRE Ours was more [about] honor man Black [gangs] have no honor I'll give you an example We [Los Angeles City Police Department] did a raid of two crack houses Two gangs that were involved--one from Crips and one from one off-shoot of the Crips You can break into a black's house and they [police]'ll tear the whole house apart and blacks won't do shit I remember walking into a--busting into a Chicano's house Before the cops the guy knew what was going to happen He just said Wait a minute man My parents know nothing about it What you want is over there " He just gave it up As hard as it

is to believe there is still some honor I mean I grew up and there were certain things you respected You respected your parents You respected the elderly You respected women and children There was at least a code Fucked up as it may have been but there was some things that you didn't do

VASQUEZ There were some limits?

ALATORRE There were some limits It was all territorial You know "This my barrio What did gang fights end up being? They ended up being [over] somebody [who] violated the territory or violated a broad And that was what started the fights And it wouldn't stop You hit one and they would come back and hit you You hit back and you hit back and forth Somewhere along there you forgot why it started Sometimes it is family against family That is a tough one

VASQUEZ What is the answer?

ALATORRE But there is honor man

VASQUEZ What is the answer in controlling these gangs?

ALATORRE You're never going to break down You're never going to I mean the idea of doing

away with gangs is naive What you want to do is harness that energy and harness that leadership into something constructive

VASQUEZ Is this what you were trying to do?

ALATORRE Oh yes That is what we tried to do in the Social Action Training Center Walter Bremond and I Well Bremond was basically Philoso-
phically he understood Chicanos and blacks and that we've got to be together When all was said and done with he was a black first and it is all he cared about

VASQUEZ Who were the black elements in the civil rights movement here in Los Angeles that you were able to work with?

ALATORRE That I could work with? I worked with Oh God Who was it? Reverend You know a couple of the reverends [Bishop] H H Brookins was one of them, Reverend [James] Hardwick or something like that You know I mean I [worked] out a good relationship with Opal Jones after a while She understood that I was no Milquetoast You know for some reason or another, I've always had [good] relationships with blacks I mean blacks even freak out

Like I've gone to three or four I mean
I'll end up doing the eulogy at a black
funeral And they're just kind of like How did
this guy show up? We were all his friends And
I think it goes back to when I went to college
I couldn't relate to anybody else but I could
relate to blacks

VASQUEZ This was at Cal State Los Angeles?

ALATORRE Cal State L A yes You know at that time it
was around dressing and about women and sports
It wasn't about oppression or anything else
because I had the luxury of being able to
intellectualize about that I mean I had to
make a living Then it just carried over I
got to meet Merv Dymally and with Merv I met
other blacks I knew most of the black elected
officials I've always had a very good
relationship with other black elected officials
and people that I started out with

VASQUEZ Do you occasionally work with [Congressman]
Augustus [F] Hawkins?

ALATORRE To a lesser degree

VASQUEZ [Senator] Bill Greene?

ALATORRE Oh yes Bill Merv and Leon [Ralph] was

there Obviously [Assemblywoman] Maxine [Waters] whom I probably respect more than I respect anybody else All of them Who do I respect the most? I have a lot of respect for Augustus Hawkins because he just represents a whole different era

VASQUEZ Who is the Mexican Augustus Hawkins in Los Angeles? Do we have one?

ALATORRE It has to be Ed Roybal yes It is just that Gus hooked onto something and stayed with it Roybal

VASQUEZ Was all over the map?

ALATORRE He is not seen as identifiable I mean the closest to anything is gerontology you know? But man the guy's position is tremendous man He just marches to his own drummer

VASQUEZ Reconstruct for me if you will the civil rights movement in the Mexican community the Chicano movement [including] all the War on Poverty programs in Los Angeles Let's take a date Let's take 1967

ALATORRE Let me just try and remember I graduated in 1966 okay? And I immediately jumped onto the Educational Resource Center I wrote a proposal

VASQUEZ Right under Phil M3ntez

ALATORRE Under Phil M3ntez What I recall of it it was a
War on Poverty and the constant fights with EYOA
from Joe Maldonado to Richard Arag3n whatever
his name is That was the Association of the
Mexican-American Educators and the attempt of the
administrators [whom] we called the Uncle
Toms [who tried] to take over the association
because they represented system and the
Association of Mexican-American Educators
represented a threat to that system In the NAPP
days [it was] Opal Jones against Mexicans
Shrewd lady man I mean you would have to be
up a lot of hours to outslick that lady but I
developed a very very good relationship to the
point She was telling Patrice Rushen who
is a jazz singer I saw her a couple of weeks
ago and she told me that she had seen Opal Jones
a few years back Somehow she got into a
conversation about me She said that she just
remembered me as being an outspoken loudmouth
that was always consistent and 'He played
fair It wasn't anti-black as [were other]
Chicanos We had little with the poverty

program so we blamed the blacks We never focused it on who the real culprit was but it was easier to fight another minority because minorities have a much easier shot fighting each other than going after the one who just pulls the strings So it was the War on Poverty the Association of Mexican-American Educators It then was [Rodolfo] 'Corky' [González]

VASQUEZ I was going to ask you How about the more [visible leaders] ?

ALATORRE Corky González Tijerina

VASQUEZ Leftist groups? Student groups? I don't know is left a good name? Militant activist groups?

ALATORRE We will get to that Then it was Corky's [Crusade] for Justice Reies Tijerina then I was the western regional director for the NAACP I traveled around and started the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund Then came the student walkouts underground newspapers the Brown Berets who were everywhere under the sun Then you had What was the name of the group of pinche locos?

VASQUEZ La Junta?

ALATORRE La Junta Then you had Moe [Aguirre]'s operation then you had the three dope pushers from the projects [Los Tres del Barrio] Then that offshoot to [Antonio H] Tony's [Rodriguez] Maoist reading sessions Then UMAS MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil de Aztlán] and that kind of stuff

VASQUEZ Who contributed what to the community and how did it all work together?

ALATORRE I think that the Association of Mexican-American Educators went through different phases but during its It was the conscience and-- depending on the leadership--it was a vehicle for attacking basically the educational system in not only trying to advance teachers but also taking on textbooks and textbook revisions taking on [Superintendent of Public Instruction] Wilson [C] Riles taking on school districts That was one Then you had probably You know the poverty program was another thing There were positive offshoots from it

VASQUEZ What do you think were the positive offshoots of the poverty program?

ALATORRE Employment opportunity to

ALATORRE Like SER--Jobs for Progress?

ALATORRE Yes but I'm only talking about employment

VASQUEZ I see

ALATORRE It was the vehicle for the emergence of the middle class you know the educated People had B A 's That was one part of it So community-based organizations--whatever little we had--it also developed some grass roots leaders I think that is probably the most positive of the [poverty programs] You know there was monies during the time when you know community gangs would have just blown the whole city up

VASQUEZ There was a lot of gang activity in the early sixties It seemed to dissipate almost in congruence with the political activity Do you see it that way?

ALATORRE You know at the [Educational] Resource Center we had a lot of money to hire teachers to get these kids involved in shit outside of hanging around on the street And you know long hot summers ? There were jobs for kids and they were too tired by the time they got through at the end of the day to go gang banging There was the rise of ethnic awareness on the part of kids

starting at junior high and high school And the emphasis of money to go around was misspent but for that period of time you could say [that for] the end result it was well spent because it kept the peace during a time when there was just a lot of you know inter-gang rivalries And you know we started doing workshops We started football leagues so you could throw "chingazos on the football field So from that standpoint it kind of like You could say it was negative because all it did It pacified

The positive is that there weren't as many killings Chicano against Chicano Then you had the conscience of the school district against young kids that got indicted and that whole movement

VASQUEZ Did that catalyze do you think the community?

ALATORRE Yes You know what the kids embarrassed the parents into [action] It took kids to basically say Hey for whatever reason we've had enough man " And it helped out teachers It helped out the upward mobility of teachers It brought about some changes in the way the schools did their business That became the

focal point of attention of parents to get more involved in their schools. The idea of a quality education and integration then took a backseat because all the efforts were spent at trying to improve their own community schools and then they wanted to bus the kids out. They say, "What the hell? We spent all this time to do our work and now you are busing our kids somewhere else?"

The [National Chicano] Moratorium. I mean I remember it vividly, man. I remember taking this woman [Peggy Cuthbertson] with me to the Moratorium. She worked for Senator [Alan] Cranston's office. I remember her during the Bobby Kennedy campaign. She was then Bobby Kennedy's press secretary along with [Frank] Mankiewicz. I just remember telling her, "Walk in this way." I learned how to deal during mass confusions. People freak out. Like I told her, "If anything happens, that is where you go. That is how you get out of here." Because the natural tendency would be to move a certain way. You were going to get caught by the buses. The buses ended up trapping the people. A lot of people got hurt. And basically her dropping me off on

Brooklyn Avenue and spending the whole night
bailing people out of jail I had a great
ability to raise money from leftists

VASQUEZ Tell me about that

ALATORRE I met She was a grand dame of the
Communist party in Los Angeles

VASQUEZ Dorothy Healey?

ALATORRE Yes Dorothy Healey Old Dorothy When the
thirteen I just placed a cold call to
her I told her I want to compliment you for
all the work you've done for blacks and helping
out the black oppressed But you've never done
anything for Mexicans Here is a problem I'm
out in the business for raising money

VASQUEZ What was your position at that time? What were
you doing at that time?

ALATORRE I was the western regional director for the
NAACP But I was in Fresno I had driven out to
Fresno for the AMAE convention and I got a phone
call from Sal Castro's girlfriend telling me he
got indicted and they had busted him I remember
driving all the way back I had just gotten
there and I turned right around An hour and a
half later I drove back going up to the house on

Gage Street

VASQUEZ Where La Raza newspaper was?

ALATORRE Uh-huh And working out of there the whole night raising money for And I just called Dorothy Healey I just said Hey baby this is what is happening It was kind of like I tested her And she responded The only thing she ever asked of me was to speak at a dinner for the Committee for the [Protection of the] Foreign-Born On the platform was Bunchy Carter who died at UCLA They killed him there The [US Organization] shot him ¹ Angela Davis [Clifford] Fried from SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] and myself I remember speaking there--you know it was all immigrant Jews leftists--and making my pitch

VASQUEZ Which was?

ALATORRE That there was a newer growing activism with the Chicano community as exemplified by the Chicano Thirteen ² This was a beginning of a movement

1 Shooting at UCLA of two members of the Black Panther party by members of the US Organization in 1969

2 Thirteen community activists indicted after the 1968 high school walkouts on charges of conspiracy

that Who knew? I didn't know where it was going to end up but that we needed to form coalitions amongst like-minded progressive-thinking people

VASQUEZ What was the response you got?

ALATORRE I got the money I remember calling her I made one phone call on the day of the moratorium It was basically a blank check You see she had a relationship with [bail] bonds people I just promised them I mean I bailed everybody out and nobody ever signed anything Nobody ever got burnt None of the bondsmen ever got burned I remember making the phone call And she said
How many people were arrested? I said
Hundreds She said 'Go ahead

VASQUEZ This was for the 1970 moratorium?

ALATORRE Yes And she got this one guy to put up his house about \$2 or \$3 million

VASQUEZ Do you know remember who it was?

ALATORRE I don't even remember who it was

VASQUEZ Looking back now when would you identify the peak of the Chicano movement in Los Angeles? By that I mean the period when there seemed to be the greatest amount of activity across the

greatest [spectrum] The schools?

ALATORRE The walkouts The schools

VASQUEZ So it would be 1968 and 1969?

ALATORRE Yes And the Moratorium

VASQUEZ Up to 1970?

ALATORRE Yes

VASQUEZ What do you think caused the decline because there was a noticeable decline?

ALATORRE A movement toward self-centeredness like Hey we've made it and like You owe me a living

VASQUEZ A sort of middle-class element?

ALATORRE It was kind of like they opened the door and students thought that it was going to stay open When I left [the University of California] UC Irvine probably from 1974 and on it just started going downhill Whatever was done--I mean I'm not bullshitting you--at the state level it was done out of shucking and jiving

It was [Assemblyman] Willie [L Brown Jr] myself and a few others that would hold budgets We held them ransom At one time Willie and I spoke to the graduation at Boalt [Hall School of Law University of California Berkeley] and it was the end of the result of

what we had done three years prior He was the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and I was on the Subcommittee on Education My target then was law schools I remember having Justice [Frank C] Newman then Dean Newman of Boalt law school sit there and tell me how for academic or whatever reasons it was The idea of affirmative action was fraught with problems and it was academically prurient His conscience "could not allow for the creation of quotas at the law school

So I remember making a call to Willie I said I want to let you know I want to get this motherfucker This is what he said he said Okay this is how you get him fund the law school and de-fund the administration So that is what we did We funded the law school and basically I let Newman know I let you know You don't have a job We're not funding the administration

VASQUEZ And the outcome was?

ALATORRE It took him one week to come up with an affirmative action program And three years later my compadre graduated Luis [A]

Carrillo And it was beautiful It was a graduation Willie and I were the keynote speakers We were marching in and all of a sudden mariachis started playing Now you could imagine Newman's face dropped I mean how could this happen? It was a pretty solemn occasion and the march is playing Then all of a sudden it was like they pulled the plug and mariachis came out Man I turned around and looked at my compadre and he looked at me and he let out a big yell Then they introduced Willie Brown and they played La Negra Then when I got up they played Feria de las Flores

VASQUEZ What year was this?

ALATORRE This was 1978 or 1976 something like that

VASQUEZ Nineteen seventy-six

ALATORRE I mean Willie and I commented We sat there on the platform and saw more freaks going up to get their diploma guys in paint overalls women Asians white women Chicanos blacks And I remember telling Newman I said Now this is what you said couldn't be done ' And he laughed but we were never invited back to the law school

VASQUEZ I want to build up to your assembly years of course Tell me a little bit about what you think you learned or got out of the Ford Foundation internship? How did that connect if at all with the administrative assistantship to Wally Karabian?

ALATORRE The Ford Foundation was just a vehicle to expose me on a full-time basis to a campaign And it afforded me the opportunity to go to school at the same time

VASQUEZ This was your own plan? Your own thing again?

ALATORRE Yes

VASQUEZ And the Wally Karabian campaign?

ALATORRE It was just a means to an end for me I liked the guy I hated the person [Norma Yoakum] that ran against him He was young smart never knew anything about Mexicans and let me do whatever I wanted to He would never question anything I recommended to him

VASQUEZ Why is that?

ALATORRE Because he trusted me

VASQUEZ Now when did you decide yourself that you wanted to run for the assembly?

ALATORRE I'll tell you what it was I was going out with

this woman [Peggy Cuthbertson] that was
It's a funny thing It's the same one that I
took to the Chicano Moratorium You can imagine
I only took her That was the first date I
had Needless to say it was

VASQUEZ Exciting?

ALATORRE It wasn't a normal date She saw cops She was
just a tall redhead She was a beautiful smart
lady I never saw her again and she called me up
one day and she said What happened? I said
What are you talking about? Well you know
you took me to the Moratorium I picked you
up We spend the night together or the day
together and I never saw you again I've been
busy ' So then I saw her She asked me to meet
with her and she already decided to go back to
Washington She said basically There is no
reason for me to stay Give me a reason and I'll
stay I said I'll talk to you tomorrow
Then we started communicating I went back to
Washington several times And I even thought
about the idea and [that] really is the truth

I went to see Armando [M] Rodríguez He
was assistant secretary of education [assistant

commissioner in the United States Office of Education] or whatever it was I went to look for a job because I was thinking of going to Washington And he was so paranoid about me that he didn't want to have anything to do with me And yet every position he got Phil and I and Mike Montez of the state department You know he was on the State Board of Education Pretty much we got him the jobs even the one in Washington It was pretty devastating

[End Tape 2 Side A]

[Begin Tape 2 Side B]

ALATORRE And I told him [Karabian] I'm looking He said "Fabulous why don't you take a job with me? Would you come up to Sacramento? I said Jesus I live in Huntington Beach ' And I said My kids [are there] and everything ' He said Don't worry about it I'll find a reason for you to fly down every weekend So he offered me the job

VASQUEZ As his administrative assistant?

ALATORRE As his administrative assistant And it was kind of like I had no job I mean no real job but to troubleshoot for him

VASQUEZ What kind of things did that involve?

ALATORRE I started writing legislation at first just learning about that I would represent him at different places in the state speaking I would come down and take care of some problems he had in this district

 Then all of a sudden there was a special election [July 20 1971] for the state senate for which [Assemblyman] David [A] Roberti decided to run We had a meeting and Wally said I'm going to loan you out on the campaign I'm going to pay for you to work on this campaign I'll loan you out full-time And your job is not only to do the job on the campaign but if he wins there is going to be an open assembly seat So why shouldn't it be you?

VASQUEZ Had you thought about it before?

ALATORRE I thought about the idea that I would love to run but it happened so fast that I didn't have a lot of chance to think I just got immersed in the campaign and I did a very good job And he won I remember flying back and he said

VASQUEZ Roberti?

ALATORRE Yes Might as well think about running Deals

were already being cut with Roybal and the like for Ralph [M] Ochoa So they met with the Speaker of the Assembly who was Bob Moretti and I guess somewhere along the way they cut a deal without even consulting Wally who was the majority leader They knew that I was his choice

VASQUEZ Do you remember the role of John [A] FitzRandolph in that?

ALATORRE Oh sure John was the chief deputy for the speaker He is now at the Whittier College School of Law John was a political operative for Bobby

VASQUEZ Who were the promoters of Ochoa?

ALATORRE You know Bob Moretti just wanted a smooth transition He was losing a member and he wanted whatever member

VASQUEZ Who could win?

ALATORRE To win And by putting all his resources behind that candidate he was going to be the first one to help elect a Chicano and it would also be his Chicano If he would have thought about it he would rather have had me than Ralph whom he did not even know But he thought he was cutting a good deal because he was already thinking of

running for governor

There was going to be a lot of things that he was going to gain from it not only electing but also winning over Roybal and getting some commitments out of him if he supported his candidate to support him for governor and all that stuff So all of that came into play

VASQUEZ Tell me about the primary [October 19 1971]

ALATORRE Oh it was a fabulous primary

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE We just beat the living crap out of Ralph Ochoa He had all the endorsements but I had some smart people around me

VASQUEZ Like who?

ALATORRE I had a guy by the name of [Kenneth] Kenny Katz who came out of USC Democratic politics If you want to talk about cutthroat politics 'SC was the height of cutthroat politics

VASQUEZ It all goes back to Jesse Unruh right?

ALATORRE Yes It went back to Jesse Unruh It became the Trojan Democratic Club Then I had a guy by the name of Mike Navarro who was a genius when it came to doing campaign mailings and having gimmicks and shit like that

VASQUEZ Is this the TV Bob Navarro?

ALATORRE No He's a Mexican He worked for Gray Advertising Company one of the most successful PR [public relations] guys Then I had an unlimited You know I didn't have any restraints as far as money was concerned

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE Because Wally funded the whole campaign And for Wally it was not only paying back for what I had done but he saw that for his future "Hey this is my guy Then I discovered gays

VASQUEZ Discovered what?

ALATORRE I discovered gays And that was the silent mass of people that nobody ever concentrated on I was the first one to have an organized campaign with gays before Vince Bugliosi And it was that kind of guy that I had to run the campaign He was very methodical

VASQUEZ Who?

ALATORRE Kenny Katz Next door to my office which was on Sunset [Boulevard] was a gay bar One day he walked in to have a drink and he looked around and said What the shit is this? So he started striking up conversations with these guys and he

started finding out that they all lived around there--I mean two and two He said Jesus He asked me 'Do you have a problem [with that]?' I said I have no problem with that " I set up a meeting with the gay leadership and we set it up at this guy's apartment Troy [D] Perry

VASQUEZ Who was it again?

ALATORRE Troy Perry founder of the Metropolitan Community Church and about five guys all prominent gay leaders We took the campaign to them I remember they had an endorsing convention at the Metropolitan Community Church We worked it out I was going to be the last one on I knew exactly what was on their mind besides the Consenting Adults Bill I blew them out of the water I then became the darling of the gays

Then we had another gimmick We developed it during Wally's campaign We got the best-looking women to walk with a good-looking guy So whoever came to the door If it was a woman the guy would do the pitch If it was a guy the woman did the pitch Then we had a self-contained I saw it during the Kennedy

campaign in New York which I worked on It was continuous

VASQUEZ The Bobby Kennedy campaign?

ALATORRE Bobby Kennedy campaign It was a continuous feed on a little portable TV We tested it out and if we got the attention for five seconds we had their attention up to sixty-eight seconds So we developed a continuous wired message for me The mind had never been used Then we had happy faces We gave away like 200 000 happy faces They were all over the schools on posts on everything

VASQUEZ Where did you get that idea? Again Navarro?

ALATORRE Navarro It was just a gimmick Kids used to follow me to get happy faces

VASQUEZ What were the issues in your first campaign?

ALATORRE I was young and knew my community well That was the issue Silently it was a first chance for an elected Chicano for a long time

VASQUEZ Why silently?

ALATORRE Because depending on the area I mean some people thought I was an Italian I never said I was I never said I wasn't

VASQUEZ Any backlash as a result of that?

ALATORRE Yes A couple of them said I thought you were an Italian I said I never told you I was an Italian " 'Yes but you let me believe you were I said That was your belief It wasn't mine We had a large Italian population Gays were my margin of victory We figured it out We could look at an area and if there were two people living in a household of the same sex it was gay or lesbian And we mailed accordingly

VASQUEZ Who did your mailing?

ALATORRE It was written by a guy named [Michael] Mike Bowler He is a lawyer And it was refined by Wally Mike Navarro did all the graphic works to make it

VASQUEZ Mike or Bob?

ALATORRE Bob Oh it was Mike Navarro I take it back It was Mike Navarro He knew how to sell things so he would put it in a limited amount of words pictures and prettiness Everything It just all flowed And gimmicks for women from potholders to happy faces to notepads to the TV thing to It was a textbook campaign

VASQUEZ Did you use much media?

ALATORRE No we didn't You know TV was just

ridiculous But it became a national campaign because of the La Raza Unida party

VASQUEZ Right What was your relationship with the La Raza Unida party

ALATORRE They went against me What it was was they became a tool for the Republican party What they did was that [Donald H] Don Segretti mastered his trickery during my campaign Don Segretti went to USC Don Segretti knew Kenny Katz my campaign manager He just showed up one day and said Hey Kenny what's happening? I want to help you And from the egg-throwing of [Senator Edmund G] Muskie to the disruption of a rally that I had with [Vice President] Hubert [H] Humphrey to a couple of other things It was all masterminded ahead of time It was like the trial run [for "dirty tricks] was my campaign

VASQUEZ For Segretti?

ALATORRE For what they did at the national level They had started two years before on abortions hiring a Chicano bishop

VASQUEZ Bishop [Robert Flores]?

ALATORRE No no It was a guy from Texas and he cam-

paigned all over the Southwest in targeted areas using abortions as being immoral and everything else using that Then Segretti It was really to use my campaign to see if their tactics worked They funneled money etc

VASQUEZ From the national level?

ALATORRE Yes at the national level they funneled money to La Raza Unida party it's on the Watergate tapes and everything else of how they could basically funnel money into the Raza Unida party to split the vote

VASQUEZ How did the La Raza Unida fall into something like this? How did somebody like Raul Ruiz ?

ALATORRE He was just a vehicle and there was a lot of unrest and everything else He became a symbol of total disorganization and anarchy and machismo and Chicanismo and everything else It was basically a cruel hoax against innocent students that believed that this was the way to go even though they were going nowhere and even though they prostituted themselves They knew where they were getting their money and everything else It was all laundered and the like We had the Justice Department the FBI [Federal Bureau

of Investigation] because of the intimidation of campaign workers

Finally I just said Time-out So I got a few friends of mine They paid some of the guys a visit They told them Hey one more time brother That means all of you And we start with you ' So I played it right the first time and that was it I said They ain't doing it again I knew a lot of guys a lot of guys from goons from the Teamsters to Chicano bikers that I knew to veteranos from prison a couple of organized fraternities They just told me Tell me We'll take care of that I wanted to do it the right way but then they went too far

VASQUEZ So tell me to what do you attribute your defeat?

ALATORRE I attribute my loss the first time not to the Raza Unida party

VASQUEZ To what then?

ALATORRE The day before on Sunday [Assemblyman Bill] Brophy hired a tecato [addict] to fire shots into his [Brophy's] house Now with all the chaos that Raza Unida party was involved in and the intimidation and just a lot of shit there was a high level of publicity about the campaign the

national ingredient I mean I had presidential candidates coming in and out of this district from Cranston to Muskie to Humphrey and Kennedy all of them They would come in because it was like a warm-up for the presidential campaign and the Chicanos They started discovering us So we got a lot of media attention

So Monday morning I was on my way to work the gates at one of the Pacific Telephone Company yards I listened to the radio and they had just shot into his house man He got half a million dollars of free publicity the day before the election People were afraid to go out People thought I was going to win so why go out? So people were afraid to go out and I lost I lost by about 1 000 or 1 500 votes

VASQUEZ What did that do to you?

ALATORRE I was devastated

VASQUEZ What did you learn from that first election?

ALATORRE That I wasn't going to be a nice guy You know I basically was what they wanted me to be

VASQUEZ Who is "they" ?

ALATORRE You know [people] like Wally I dressed a certain way I wore white shirts and everything

else I was the least offensive And things
that I would never have tolerated I tolerated

VASQUEZ Like?

ALATORRE You know like trying to do things the right way
and be above the fray I wasn't myself So the
opportunity availed itself in June of 1972 Then
I ran as Richard Alatorre

VASQUEZ To what do you attribute that win?

ALATORRE Two hundred thousand dollars of campaigning six
months before and much better organization

VASQUEZ Why was it better? In what way?

ALATORRE Better people We knew how to spend our money
We killed everybody just wiped them out We
wiped out Ralph Ochoa which was devastating to
the speaker because he thought that He
spent half a million dollars of his money and
they told him that he was going to win 3 to 1 I
beat him over 4 to 1 Then I let it be known I
met with some people and told them They aren't
going to do it to me again man The decision
was made The first time you do it we're coming
down I ran as myself man a typical lowlifer
I wasn't going to take shit from anybody

VASQUEZ Moretti's people attributed [your victory] to

your working harder What do you say to that?

ALATORRE Yes I did There was no doubt about it I killed myself for that campaign Ralph was into the glamour He was convinced he was going to win because he had all the endorsements I probably walked more precincts and really walked them versus See we found out that Ralph had a sickness he could only walk so long and he would start getting dizzy So I walked them I had my mother out there I had one woman that came back from Washington to work on my campaign [Peg Cuthbertson] She worked full-time I mean we were just better organized We worked harder We out-fought We out-organized them We out-walked them We outdid everything the first time The second time we did the same thing

[End Tape 2 Side B]

[Session 3 June 20 1989]

[Begin Tape 3 Side A]

VASQUEZ Councilman Alatorre the last time we talked you related a fascinating story about something that went on in your first campaign That had to do with the involvement of national [political] figures [in] local elections--in this case Don Segretti who I think at this point was working for CRP the Committee to Reelect the President He came to Los Angeles as I understand knew one of the people working on your campaign and in that way insinuated himself into a position where he could in fact involve himself in dirty tricks This involved people from La Raza Unida [party] and maybe others Can you expand on that for me?

ALATORRE Well basically what happened is [that] Don Segretti went to USC He was either a fraternity brother of my campaign manager or they were involved in campus politics Segretti showed up

one Saturday morning and said Gee Kenny I mean I just found [this] out Damn it So he just showed up and said "Hey you know I heard that you were running this campaign and I want to help So unbeknownst to us Don Segretti ended up being a central figure in the dirty tricks And what we found out through the Watergate transcripts is that they wanted to look at a campaign like ours to see if [they] could not only discredit the [Democratic] presidential aspirants but see to what extent [they could implement] their strategy to cause division within the Hispanics in an effort to neutralize [us and] develop strategies that could be used in what ended up being the presidential campaign to reelect the president I don't think that it was by accident that eggs were thrown at Ed Muskie that disruptions took place when Hubert Humphrey came in town All of that I think as we later surmised really started with Don Segretti's involvement

He allegedly walked some precincts--which we found out later on he never did Because of his relationship with my campaign manager I'm sure

that he got information that probably later on was used during the campaign

VASQUEZ Did you ever confront Mr Katz on this matter?

ALATORRE Well actually Mr Katz is the one who brought it to my attention about Segretti Because I didn't even know Don Segretti I didn't find out about Don Segretti until Katz told me that he actually came and showed up to my campaign and worked in the campaign And then he started reflecting on the things that happened that created national media attention in the campaign to discredit some of the presidential aspirants Then we put two and two together We found out through the [Watergate] transcripts that monies also exchanged hands with La Raza Unida party How they exchanged I don't really know I think it's probably in the Watergate transcripts because mention was made of money going into a third party in an effort to divide the Hispanic vote and hopefully from that being able to not only elect people locally but I think it was really part of a national strategy

VASQUEZ At that time if I remember correctly La Raza Unida seemed on the verge of becoming a

nationwide third party

ALATORRE Exactly Their birth was in Texas They were somewhat successful in Texas It picked up momentum here in California primarily in Los Angeles and it was really kind of like the home for a lot of disgruntled students and others the more activist and more left-politically thinking people [They] felt that neither one of the parties were relevant to their needs And they viewed La Raza Unida party as a vehicle to bring about change You know if in fact it was on its merit that that's what it was there for then I think they could have been a positive force But as it ended up all they were They got basically coopted by people who were running another game and found a vehicle to run that game--and it was through La Raza Unida party

VASQUEZ One thing can be said about La Raza Unida party apart from much of its ideological confusion here in Los Angeles was that it was very poorly funded It ran on very little money

ALATORRE Um-hmm [affirmative]

VASQUEZ What impact did money from the [CRP have] ?

ALATORRE Well we don't really know what money it really

did have Obviously it's not anything that was reported I don't think that they reported the fact that they got this money however it was funneled from the Republican National Committee It's in the Watergate transcripts that money was exchanged

So yes on the one hand what was amazing to me is that there was activity You know there were signs printed There was a lot of things done that took money But it was never reflected in any campaign expenditures And I think that that's usually the tactic that is used by you know some candidates where the actual expenditures are never reflected in their campaign statement So on the one hand yes I think the perception was that they had no money But then on the other hand nobody really knows what money they actually did have

VASQUEZ How and when did you decide to look into this and find out a little more?

ALATORRE Well after I found out I mean we found out later on about Don Segretti And like anybody else that was interested during that time I followed the Watergate hearings And I

think Kenny is the one who got information later on And then I had another friend of mine that knew Don Segretti from I think he was in the National Guard if I'm not mistaken

VASQUEZ Who would this be?

ALATORRE His name was [Ernest] Ernie Camacho Don Segretti was in his batallion or the like in the same unit And Don Segretti did admit to my friend that yes he was involved in the dirty tricks during the campaign that yes there was money that was exchanged yes it was done to try [out] different ideas to see which ones worked in preparation for the national campaign to reelect the president

VASQUEZ For the 1972 presidential campaign?

ALATORRE For the presidential campaign of Richard [M] Nixon

VASQUEZ In what other local campaigns do you know that this might have happened?

ALATORRE Well I know what happened in Wally Karabian's [1968] campaign using the abortion issue

VASQUEZ That early?

ALATORRE Yes When the Republican National Committee figured that this was an issue they could

capitalize on They even got a bishop if I'm not mistaken out of Texas to go on leave And he traveled all over the country in areas which they felt were marginal that enough campaigning and hammering on this issue could make the difference in some of the state and even congressional elections But I know for sure that it did take place here in Los Angeles I know it took place in Texas And I know it took place in Arizona

VASQUEZ I don't know if you're aware of the recent issue [May 1989] of a publication called Hispanic The article is entitled "The Hispanic Strategy" ¹ And it is an issue that lays out a pretty sophisticated and comprehensive strategy for going after the Hispanic vote primarily the Mexican-American Do you know of that issue?

ALATORRE I know of the issue

VASQUEZ Was it as sophisticated back then?

ALATORRE No I think it is more [sophisticated now] See because I don't think politics at that time was

¹ Parker Richard and Sharpe Thomas H The Hispanic Strategy Hispanic (May 1989) 28-40

as sophisticated as it is now I think if they did it today using computers and computer technology and the like they probably would have much more [of a] significant impact I think it was done in a very unorganized manner but if they would have done it before with the knowledge they have now I think they could have probably been much more successful But eventually they would have been found out

You know you have to look at who as an example believed in [La Raza Unida] And there were a lot of students that believed in La Raza Unida party as being a viable alternative I mean a lot of people worked and spent a lot of hours in that campaign And they were really fed a bill of goods I remember even the second time out speaking at Cal State L A to a class of a friend of mine this whole issue came up I told them very honestly I said 'You know I think the cruelest thing that anybody could use Because it's using our own people You know what I mean? It's using our own people for our own selfish interests other than the stated interest I'll be very honest with you--it could

be said that it's to my fault--but man I don't believe in using people You know I am not one that is going to tell somebody something only for them to find out later on that it was a lie Because it doesn't help foster and keep people involved in something One thing that I learned out of you know the Saul Alinsky school of community organization you've got to give people victories And when you are purporting and advancing something like Hey we're going to make a difference and we're going to win and everything else and people put their blood sweat and tears into something only to find out that nothing ever happened as a result of it you are alienating them even further from the process--and you're not being honest with them I'm sure nobody really knew the side deals that were going on I mean I think that the students who worked in that campaign and people that worked on that were committed to the principles of whatever it was that those principles were

VASQUEZ But who do you understand led the campaign against you in La Raza Unida here in Los Angeles?

ALATORRE Who led it against me?

VASQUEZ Yes And why?

ALATORRE Let's see I'm trying to think of who it was that Well you know Raul Ruiz was the central figure and it was people around him

VASQUEZ What about Rodolfo Quiñones?

ALATORRE Huh?

VASQUEZ How about Rudy Quiñones?

ALATORRE I don't really know I mean I couldn't tell you I could remember him by face some of them I can't even remember by name

VASQUEZ But you identify Professor Raul Ruiz as being [key]

ALATORRE Oh yes Well definitely Raul Ruiz was I mean because you know he obviously has a tremendous ego And he got caught up with it You know he got caught up with all the attention and adulation that people were giving him All I'm saying is that he probably did a greater injustice than he did a justice to the students And I mean I mentioned it at Cal State L A shit I mentioned it right on his campus I mean it was a farce man You now because

VASQUEZ What was your view of the Democratic party at the

time?

ALATORRE A great party but like anybody they're not willing to give anything to anybody See power is never given Power is taken The idea is a false one starting from the premise that the party owes us something Nobody ever gives you anything You've got to go after it and take it And see I've always believed that you can yell and scream [from the] outside and nothing will ever happen If anything is to happen it's going to be through a combination of things It's going to be having people inside as well as having the pressure coming from the outside Because the greater the pressure outside the easier it is to move inside and interpret And you know you can accomplish the same things that people are talking about outside by doing them inside and just changing you know what the perceptions are--that people may be accomplishing basically the same things but using a different methodology

VASQUEZ So political maturity comes from what? Being able to be outside [as well as] inside and have communications between the two?

ALATORRE Oh yes You've got to be able to have it all ways See we have gone through the whole cycle of maturity in the political process You know there still are people that do nothing but complain and really never want anything to happen because then you take the platform away from them to complain And there are a lot of quote leaders of La Raza Unida party still complaining And I've always questioned whether they ever wanted anything to happen because it takes away their vehicle

VASQUEZ For the sake of reference would you care to name any people like that?

ALATORRE I think Raul is probably the classic example I think [Antonio] Tony Rodríguez is probably another I mean he cares about certain things But then there's also the part that Hey if

VASQUEZ Is it a case of I'll never be able to play so denounce everybody in the business ?

ALATORRE Yes This is the only way I can get attention ' And it's always under the guise of quote the community

VASQUEZ Or of being political gadflies? Is there

legitimacy to that?

ALATORRE Oh Is what?

VASQUEZ Is there legitimacy to that being a political gadfly? Maybe that's a role these people serve?

ALATORRE There's a lot of them There's a lot of people who are political gadflies in the process sure But see I just have problems with gadflies See I'm more interested in getting things done And see I'm into the ends You know I'm not into just [protesting]

VASQUEZ What would you call this pragmatism?

ALATORRE Oh I think it's very pragmatic I have a very pragmatic viewpoint about life

VASQUEZ Let's come back to that as we go over the different periods of your career

ALATORRE Sure

VASQUEZ All right you're an assemblyman now Tell me about your district Draw me a mental picture of the parameters of it the composition of it its political history and what was expected of you

ALATORRE Well the first district I represented [Forty-eighth Assembly District] was made up of east Hollywood Silverlake Echo Park Lincoln Heights El Sereno probably a little bit of

Mount Washington a little bit of Alhambra and I think it went up to the unincorporated boundary line of Los Angeles County That was my initial district

Primarily the reason I won when you look at the composition of it it was maybe 25 percent Chicano But see it was all the [different] ingredients There was every [kind of] dooper every hippie you know we had old people we had gays we had Chicanos we had blacks we had Asians we had Italianos and we had Anglos in that district And see it's in that kind of a composition of a district where a Chicano obviously had a chance You had to understand [each group's] selfish interests It wasn't going to be an ethnocentric campaign And if you projected to them that you cared about them you had a shot Because it was basically a very liberal district that you could do a lot of very creative things and you know people would be happy

VASQUEZ Who preceeded you?

ALATORRE Dave Roberti Well Bill Brophy for a little bit and then Dave Roberti before that

VASQUEZ What was it that you had to overcome? Were there some limitations that they might have had or advantages they left you?

ALATORRE What?

VASQUEZ What advantage might they have left you?

ALATORRE Well the advantage I had going in is I had Dave Roberti's endorsement But the disadvantage

VASQUEZ But your opponent [Ralph Ochoa] had the speaker's endorsement

ALATORRE Oh yes See he had all the money he needed

VASQUEZ He had the establishment money?

ALATORRE He had all the establishment money all of the endorsements But we discovered that I wasn't going to have a problem with money I think we spent our money more intelligently But we had a lot of people We had a great campaign organization

VASQUEZ Of what? Volunteers?

ALATORRE A lot of volunteers A lot of students of mine I mean you know man even though during the time of La Raza Unida party anybody who supported me was a vendido I mean I had a lot of students that I taught at Long Beach State and I taught at Irvine And I just knew a lot of

people over the years that I'd either helped they liked me whatever it was You know because I had a record before I ran for political office

VASQUEZ As what? You told me [about] the institutions you were connected with but what do you think that record was as what? What was your image?

ALATORRE I think that my image was one that here was a guy with a three-piece suit who was there before most people I mean I was involved with the old Chicano movement before there was a movement

VASQUEZ But you were able to use this in only one part of your district What about the rest of your district?

ALATORRE The rest of it it was that you know We targeted the district correctly We had one thing going [that] they didn't that was Dave Roberti He was liked in obviously the further west you went and from east Hollywood very well liked That was very helpful I had [City Councilman] John Ferraro who was another Italiano because there were a lot of Italianos there

VASQUEZ What had your association with John Ferraro been

up to that point? He was already on the city council wasn't he?

ALATORRE Oh yes he was already a city councilman
Actually I got the endorsement through my relationship with Wally Karabian And they go back They went to the same school even though John graduated long before he did But it was more Wally's relationship than it was mine But I got to meet him and I got to know him and he got to like me I just you know I worked my ass off I mean that's what I had going And we identified the one thing nobody knew--it was kind of like our secret weapon--which were gays

VASQUEZ You told me about that last time we talked

ALATORRE I mentioned that we were Our first headquarters was on Sunset Boulevard right across the street from the El Cid which is the flamenco joint Next door to that

VASQUEZ Near Micheltorena [Street] more or less

ALATORRE Yes exactly Next door to that was a bar It was a gay bar we didn't even know it But my campaign manager found out about it that it was a gay place And in talking [we found] there was a very high concentration of gays living in

Silverlake Echo Park and Mount Washington and east Hollywood The gay community was totally unorganized The Metropolitan Community Church was in its embryonic stages Kenny Katz came to me and we had a meeting and he said Do you have a problem with gays?" I said "No He said Do you realize then 'dot-dot-dot' and he mentioned like about ten clubs in Silverlake that were gay gay clubs gay bars And he said I have a meeting and I'm trying to set up a meeting with the leadership of the gay community whatever that may be " He said "But there's no point in having a meeting if you're not going to be able to take it and you know deal with them And I said Hey I don't have a problem at all So we met

I remember we met at an apartment and Troy Perry who was one of the founders of the Metropolitan Community Church was there and about five or six gay activists I guess they were just blown away that somebody seeking public office would even try to reach out And I think that more than anything else helped me in our whole organization to get their support and to

know how to reach out into that community and to send mail into that community saying something that only a gay would understand And we targeted it

We figured out that in certain areas if there were two women two men in a household the likelihood [was] that they were gay But yet we didn't take the chance we didn't just out-and-out say it but we framed the mail in a way that a gay would understand it

VASQUEZ Who did your direct mailing?

ALATORRE A lot of it was written by a lawyer friend of ours [Michael Bowler] and corrected by Wally Karabian--who corrected everything I mean you know he loved all that stuff And then this guy Mike Navarro was the one who did the graphic work for it--beautiful graphics Everything was high-quality stuff That was a secret weapon

And then we looked at the Chicano community I just had to take my piece of it Because we were going after everything outside of it

VASQUEZ Was it any different than say the East L A

Chicano community at the time? Where was it
[Chicanos] concentrated?

ALATORRE The Chicanos? Same Yes El Sereno Lincoln Heights primarily Some Chicanos in Echo Park but primarily it was Lincoln Heights El Sereno and Boyle Heights So all we needed was a piece of it We didn't go after all of it you know we just wanted our piece Because our campaign was concentrated in the non-Chicano community And it's kind of like we were outsiders but then we came in

VASQUEZ So it had to be a pretty multifaceted campaign

ALATORRE Oh it was a very multifaceted campaign It had to be It probably is a great cross section of what Los Angeles is today was my district With Alhambra being quote the conservative part of the district Which was [also the case] in Atwater [Village] which is basically a blue-collar very conservative part of the district

VASQUEZ Atwater has changed dramatically in the last few years

ALATORRE Oh now it's [mostly] Chicanos practically yes

VASQUEZ What was your mindset at the time? There are different approaches that legislators take they

either go there to represent a district or they go there to lead that district in terms of their interpretation [of the district's needs]

ALATORRE Well I went up there with the idea that Chicanos had not been in Sacramento And I went there and took risks

VASQUEZ But why should you identify yourself as that if only a small portion of your district was Chicano?

ALATORRE I'm a Chicano Basically I mean after it was all said and done Whatever I did for Chicanos the liberals would think was great So I really wasn't taking a risk It was a risk in some [quarters] but by and large I mean it was such a liberal district that they would applaud me They expected me to do that Plus I did You know I was good on working you know labor issues liberal on criminal justice issues liberal on the right of choice for women you know the responsibility and the role of the delivery of health care and humane services

VASQUEZ So you had an agenda did you?

ALATORRE I think that my agenda was You know at least I got there running I didn't get there

trying to figure out where the bathroom was I
already had relationships

VASQUEZ Let's talk a little bit about that [For some
assemblymen] the first term is having varying--
and sometimes more interesting than others
[terms]--experiences in their first year their
first term breaking in learning the ropes
What was your experience?

ALATORRE See I'll tell you something I had it made

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE Because Speaker of the Assembly Bob Moretti was
dying to demonstrate to me that he was going to
be my friend See Moretti made a big thing out
of friendship And he was an Italiano--from my
vantage point in the best sense of the word
You know family to him was important
Friendships were important And loyalty was
important

VASQUEZ Personal loyalties?

ALATORRE Personal loyalty And that's what I believe in
just as a natural I remember at the Democratic
national convention in Miami

VASQUEZ What year was this 1972?

ALATORRE Nineteen seventy-two I mean he wanted me--and

the general election hadn't even taken place yet I had already won the primary and it was tantamount to winning And I was going to win it But he wanted me to endorse him for speaker And I wouldn't do it

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE Because you know I was still pissed off [because of what] he had done Because I knew him And he did it without thinking And that even pissed me off even more

VASQUEZ Did he do it without thinking or did he do it because of other people's thinking?

ALATORRE Oh it was practical Well yes he did it without thinking He just thought that hey he was going to get something for doing it And he didn't get anything because he lost And I mean he almost got into a fight with me right on the floor of the Democratic convention He said I'm going to cut your nuts off if you don't support me

VASQUEZ So he was [conducting] state politics at the national convention?

ALATORRE At the national convention Because you know it's kind of like He always liked me And

he always knew that I wasn't you know one of these prim proper Mexicans or white boys or anything else I can get down with the best of them You know nothing was given to him and nothing was given to me

VASQUEZ What was it he wanted from you, besides an endorsement?

ALATORRE He wanted Well at first it was

VASQUEZ Loyalty?

ALATORRE Sure he wanted loyalty because

VASQUEZ You were trying to win back the [assembly] majority at the time as Democrats

ALATORRE We were Yes we went back to the majority You know we lost it for six months Because of my defeat we lost redistricting as a result of it Because they had already cut a deal that was going to be signed by the governor on a redistricting when I lost the first big special election the deal was off And as it ended up the courts did the redistricting in 1974 So you know we had that

And then I remember going to his office He invited me Because he had you know raised some money and he wanted to give it to me So we

had a long discussion And it was a whole different thing I mean it wasn't him yelling or anything else Because I told him I said Hey I ain't going to be intimidated I don't give a shit if you're the speaker It doesn't matter to me I'm going to do what I'm going to do And he told me 'I respect that And I remember--this always stuck out in my mind--he said If you give me a chance I will show you that I can be as loyal as Wally Karabian was to you Because I'm that type of guy '

My first duty as a legislator was to second his nomination for speaker No freshman ever did that My committee assignments came along I was the first freshman on the [Committee on] Ways and Means in the history of the legislature up to that point I got every good committee And that was his way of demonstrating to me and showing me that he wanted my friendship And there were other Chicanos there But in his eyes they didn't matter

VASQUEZ Why? Do you know?

ALATORRE Because they weren't going to do anything I mean we had [Senator] Alex [P Garcia] Alex

was there [Joseph B] Joe Montoya

VASQUEZ Peter [R] Chacón was he there already?

ALATORRE Peter Chacón And you know they were just there I mean I guess he saw something in me What ended up being true is that you know I was fairly outspoken I had developed relationships so I understood how the process worked I was loyal I was a team player and I could get things done I started the Chicano caucus in the legislature I was the first chairman of it So everything fell my way [during] my first term of office

VASQUEZ Did you participate at all in any of the orientations that were given to freshmen assemblymen?

ALATORRE Shit I mean I already knew how to do that I mean that would have been a waste of my time And I think some people resented that And as it ended up--as it will end up two years later--there was a way of getting back at me Because I moved too fast and because I was too much of a threat

VASQUEZ Why do you think you moved too fast in whose eyes and a threat to whom?

ALATORRE Oh I think to the Chicano members of the legislature They just thought that you know I had this special relationship with the speaker And I was the one that got everything and they got nothing

VASQUEZ And they looked at it that way? Despite the fact that you tried to put a caucus together?

ALATORRE Yes Because I made something out of the caucus too Nobody wanted it so I took it And I made something of it I got a lot of publicity out of it I mean I had a fund-raiser my first year in office and had about 1 800 people at the Century Plaza Hotel That blew everybody's mind There were more people at that fund-raiser than up to that time they'd ever had at the Century Plaza Hotel--white black pink blue movie stars or anything else

VASQUEZ To what do you attribute that that success?

ALATORRE I think a lot of it is that this was the beginning Because I went after Chicano money And I was able to demonstrate that Chicanos could raise money

VASQUEZ That there was money there

ALATORRE There was money there and if you went after it

that you could get it

VASQUEZ Tell me some of the loci of Chicano money at that time

ALATORRE The what?

VASQUEZ Chicano money some of the centers of Chicano money at the time

ALATORRE It was all with professionals teachers some lawyers some doctors a few businessmen I had like about fifteen guys that pretty much served as an informal finance committee And they in turn had relationships with others And that's how we did it It was a mindblower to anybody that was there It blew the speaker's mind blew Wally Karabian's mind

VASQUEZ Your own support wasn't aware of how deep your connections were?

ALATORRE No nobody did

VASQUEZ And this was and is cumulative over a number of years?

ALATORRE Yes Well sure Because I think it's that you know I mean I've helped out people over the years And not that I've ever asked anything of it It's nice when they return the favor But man I'll tell you the perception may be that

I'm a very ruthless and very conniving and very calculated But I don't do things for that man And maybe that's to my fault But that's not my makeup man I do things that I want to do

VASQUEZ Tell me about the leadership of the assembly when you got there What were your impressions?

ALATORRE Well let me give you my impressions of liberals They were the true enemies of the people Absolutely I mean liberals were intellectual whores I mean they really were man They were great at [rhetoric] but they could never internalize it Everything was for convenience And whenever they deviated from quote their liberalism as long as they could internalize and come up with an argument it didn't matter if they whored out But they convinced themselves that whatever they did was for different reasons

VASQUEZ So as allies you found them undependable to understate it?

ALATORRE Yes I think they were undependable They were intellectual whores They were totally dishonored and bankrupt I found my friends to

be the right wing because at least you knew where they were coming from and you never had to worry about them

VASQUEZ Give me [the names of] some of the people in the first camp and some in the second camp if you care to of the so-called wishy-washy liberals' and then the convervatives

ALATORRE The classic was [Assemblyman] John Vasconcellos

VASQUEZ Tell me about him

ALATORRE Oh I think you know he's just a pie-in-the-sky you know touchy-feely--basically full of shit The Henry [A] Waxmans that had no sense of loyalty to anything but themselves Absolutely no sense of loyalty and I'll tell you why He was part of the leadership of Moretti's leadership He sat in at a meeting and lambasted Wally Karabian for supporting me criticized me for not supposedly endorsing Bob Moretti for governor and [that I allegedly] helped in disposing of him as the majority leader When Bob Moretti ran for office for governor Henry Waxman went with [Edmund G] Jerry Brown [Jr] And see what Bob Moretti failed to do was to ever ask Henry Waxman You know he was part of

the leadership and boom' He just double-crossed
Bob Moretti when the time came

VASQUEZ What does it do to a legislator's credibility
among his colleagues when they know he does that?

ALATORRE See the only thing you have in politics is your
word When your word isn't worth anything then
you cease to be Nobody ever trusted him
Because they saw through him

VASQUEZ If you have a district that will return you to
office it doesn't matter?

ALATORRE It doesn't matter It doesn't matter Because
you know the tragedy is that they just don't
know many times you know how treacherous or how
ruthless and how double-crossing people can
be And you know I don't have anything against
Henry Waxman I mean I'm just telling you that
it was a disappointment because what he
purported to be all about when you really
dissected it was not what he was all about

VASQUEZ With so much shimmer around

ALATORRE Yeah it's all you know a facade It's not
anything real And basically I found this with
a lot of people man A lot of liberals that
were great at the rhetoric but they were the

greatest exploiters and greatest abusers of say
the Chicano community

VASQUEZ What do you think that is due to? Where does
that emanate from?

ALATORRE I found some liberals that were down--I mean
that believed that internalized and believed it

VASQUEZ A matter of loyalty to their words?

ALATORRE Loyalty to themselves loyalty to what they were
supposed to be all about consistent really
understood and cared and went the extra mile
And I'll give you the best example it was
[Assemblyman] John [L] Burton John Burton was

Man I told him this I told him this
eight or nine months after we got elected I
quickly gained that perception when I went to
Sacramento You know one of my shortcomings as
well as one of my strengths is it didn't take me
long to figure somebody out And I made an
assessment of the people there And I mean I
knew the people I could trust and who I
couldn't And you know what? I wasn't wrong
very often

VASQUEZ How did John Burton prove himself to be
[trustworthy] ?

ALATORRE You know basically the guy came out of San Francisco was a bartender at Bimbo's grew up the hard way And I mean I saw this guy cry about issues that affected Chicanos poor people and the like I mean it was here

 Bob Moretti man Awesome motherfucker I mean just--you'll excuse the word--it's awesome man I mean I grew to love the guy And I had every reason to dislike him Because the man was ruthless tough in everything else But man everything he talked about he believed in

VASQUEZ How about someone like [Assemblyman Philip A] Phil Burton John's brother?

ALATORRE Phil Burton was very mechanical He was consistent with the words and there was passion But it didn't quite reach it in here like Johnny

VASQUEZ Who were some of the conservatives that even though you may have differed ideologically ?

ALATORRE Oh [Assemblyman] George [C] Deukmejian

VASQUEZ Is that right?

ALATORRE Oh yes

VASQUEZ What about him? Tell me about him

ALATORRE Straight straight-arrow tight ass

uncompromising [Senator] H L Richardson
 Let's see who else? The Republicans that ended
 up being my friends were [Assemblyman William]
 Bill Campbell [Assemblyman] Paul [V] Priolo
 [Assemblyman Robert G] Bob Beverly [Assemblyman
 Kenneth L] Ken Maddy--and still are my
 friends But what you also find out which I
 knew going in that every two years is
 partisan And you take your shots and everything
 else But after the election it's friendships
 and

VASQUEZ How important are friendship among legislators?

ALATORRE Absolutely the most important

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE Because

VASQUEZ I don't think people understand this sometimes

ALATORRE Friendships are everything man I mean you
 have friendships and if you're true and you
 would never put a person in a bad situation
 you'll never go to him for a vote that is going
 to hurt the person And I never would do that
 And they knew that I never asked people for a
 vote that I knew that they couldn't give And
 they never asked me for a vote that they knew I

couldn't give So it was honesty that developed
the friendships And people you know I believe
in getting

VASQUEZ So are the parameters of these friendships based
on the parameters of the compromise you could
take or give at any time?

ALATORRE It is based on Honesty you know And
honesty dictates everything Honesty with the
other person And never putting a person in a
situation that would come back to haunt that
individual

VASQUEZ People are that forward-looking when they're
soliciting votes are they?

ALATORRE Oh yes sure

VASQUEZ Successful ones I suppose?

ALATORRE Yeah the successful ones The ones that aren't
successful are just you know don't do anything

VASQUEZ They cut all the corners?

ALATORRE Who cut all the corners And it catches up to
you I mean there are some people I got votes
from that people would wonder How'd you get
their votes? You know?

VASQUEZ So what was your secret?

ALATORRE I believe you have to get along with people You know

VASQUEZ So to get along you go along?

ALATORRE You go along--so long as you don't have to prostitute the things that you believe in See because when it's all said and done with man 90 percent of the political process is bullshit 10 percent of it is real So long as you understand that 90 percent of what you do is all bullshit so who cares?

VASQUEZ How do you learn to differentiate between that 90 and that 10 percent? Some of the brightest minds that have gone to Sacramento have never been able to do that

ALATORRE Well because they couldn't survive It's what it's all about survival It's people it's relationships

VASQUEZ Is the legislature then a reflection of the society in which it [operates] ?

ALATORRE Absolutely

VASQUEZ Yes?

ALATORRE It's a great cross section of society You have some brilliant minds in Sacramento and you have some dumbshits up there Very few of them if I

ever put them in an alley in East L A would
ever come out They'd never survive They
wouldn't know what to do

VASQUEZ They get there as a result of what do you
think? How do they get to Sacramento?

ALATORRE They get there because of party They get there
because of friends They get there because

[End Tape 3 Side A]

[Begin Tape 3 Side B]

ALATORRE People understood that about what makes the
political process function There's only such a
small part of it that becomes truly partisan
See I understand for every two years when I was
in the legislature hey I'd do things I'd go
campaign for people I hated

VASQUEZ Because of party loyalty?

ALATORRE It's party loyalty I gave money to people I
hated because it was party loyalty or it was Bob
Moretti asking

VASQUEZ On the basis of what? On the basis of a
principle? On the basis of strategy and tactics
over time? Positioning? What?

ALATORRE It was based on you know

VASQUEZ Because the parties have never been something to

be held responsible to in this state

ALATORRE Parties in California for all intents and purposes are just parties They used to stand for something they don't stand for anything anymore

VASQUEZ Then what's the hold on the loyalty?

ALATORRE It's easier to get a vote from a Democrat than it is a Republican

VASQUEZ Even though they're not quite sure why sometimes

ALATORRE Yeah they're not quite sure So I mean you know I would go into areas I'd try and stay away from areas of friends

VASQUEZ What was the hardest thing you had to do in your early years along these lines that we're talking about having to go support somebody that you ?

ALATORRE Oh man you know Support people in rural areas that were against the farmworkers as an example That was hard But you know I always looked at it they're better than the alternative

VASQUEZ So there s an element in the pragmatic view of politics of [settling for] the lesser of the evils?

ALATORRE The lesser of the evils And let me tell you

something most of the time it's always the lesser of the evils

VASQUEZ What happens? Why doesn't our political process bring to the fore the excellence?

ALATORRE Because it breeds mediocrity It's the very people that elect that cause the mediocrity If we have mediocrity it's because we have mediocre-thinking people that are dazzled by bullshit as opposed to caring about substance The cruel hard reality is that many times the quality of legislators are better than what people deserve

VASQUEZ Is that right?

ALATORRE That's right

VASQUEZ And so in spite of other people they get good legislators occasionally is that what you're saying?

ALATORRE Yes And it's sad It's a real sad commentary

VASQUEZ Let's talk about your first term Tell me about your committee assignments your first time I'll help you if you forget

ALATORRE Well if I recall

VASQUEZ You were vice chair of the Committee on Health

ALATORRE Health which was very important

VASQUEZ [Assemblyman] Barry Keene was he the chair?

ALATORRE Yeah Barry Keene was the chair Nice guy but just you know kind of a bubbly bumbling guy

VASQUEZ Well he's a bumbling senator now [laughter]

ALATORRE Yes a bumbling senator Then I had I don't even remember

VASQUEZ Committee on Employment and Public Employees

ALATORRE That was important because it was labor

VASQUEZ How about the Committee on Labor Relations?

ALATORRE Oh Labor Relations was One was Public Employees and the other one was Labor

VASQUEZ The chair was Assemblyman Bill Greene

ALATORRE Yes and it was easy because he was a good labor vote So it was a fun committee

VASQUEZ How about your Committee on Welfare?

ALATORRE It was probably like Everybody got a shit committee And that would be perceived as being a shit committee because But it was important to the people I represented because we were talking about poor people That was very important And then I had Ways and Means

VASQUEZ Tell me how you got on Ways and Means

ALATORRE Bob

VASQUEZ Well you already did didn't you?

ALATORRE Bob Moretti is the one that got me on I was only a legislator for about eight months And there was an opening and he called me in one day and said You know it's never been done but you know this is another thing to prove to you that you know ' And he was also looking at 1976 He was looking at being governor And he had made the assessment I mean because I traveled all over up and down the state

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE Because for the same reason I go to other places outside my district Because you know Chicanos didn't have a lot of people man So I started developing relationships all over the state And in the back of my mind 1980 or '82 would have been the time I would have run for governor

VASQUEZ That was in your mind then?

ALATORRE Sure

VASQUEZ How many people knew that? Did you have a group of people around you that anticipated it?

ALATORRE A lot of people

VASQUEZ Do you think that will still happen?

ALATORRE I think we'll elect a Chicano But obviously [not] the time frame that I believed it would

happen The only thing that got in the way was the large influx of undocumented labor which created a negative reaction

VASQUEZ A backlash

ALATORRE Um-hmm [affirmative] So you know he [Moretti] looked at me as having resources not just in L A but throughout the state So he called me in and said you know It hasn't been done and everything else I want to let you know you're going to go on Ways and Means

VASQUEZ How did you feel about that?

ALATORRE I felt great Shit it was fabulous [Assemblyman] Willie [L] Brown [Jr] was the chairman Jeez we had a ball man

VASQUEZ Tell me about your chairman on Ways and Means at the time

ALATORRE Ah man this guy was the most brilliant singularly the most brilliant man that I'd ever seen operate And I still believe it today in the legislature The way he ran Ways and Means there wasn't a vote that was ever cast that was wrong for them He knew when to take liberties because he knew Because everybody was understood that if Willie Brown I mean

because so many of it Yes motion second
unanimous roll " Nobody would question it He
handled it like a glove

VASQUEZ He knew what was coming up before it came up?

ALATORRE Yes

VASQUEZ Was he like Jesse Unruh [who] knew what people
wanted? Compare him to Jesse Unruh if you can
at all

ALATORRE Jesse Unruh was totally different He was truly
a political animal where Willie has his
You know his is style flair But [he is] as
brilliant or more brilliant than Jesse

VASQUEZ It would seem to me that all this flair would be
a burden to carry no matter how brilliant you
were

ALATORRE Oh there's no doubt about it

VASQUEZ People don't like flashy politicians especially
[flashy] colored politicians

ALATORRE Well if you know what it is there's a 'good
black and a bad black a good Mexican a
 bad Mexican I was a bad Mexican Willie was a
bad black man Because he was too smart he was
too flashy And people didn't like that They
liked 'nice blacks and they liked nice

Mexicans And that's why we hit it off

VASQUEZ What do you remember about any of the hearings or any of the incidents that occurred in Ways and Means while you were serving under the chairmanship of Willie Brown?

ALATORRE Well one was that I had taught at Irvine You know I spent more time in the chancellor [Daniel G Aldrich Jr]'s office than probably his vice chancellor because of all the problems on the campus So I developed a relationship with him And I think I accomplished a lot of things when I was at Irvine in the year and a half-- almost two years--that I was there But one of the vice presidents a vice chancellor hated my guts

VASQUEZ What was his name do you remember?

ALATORRE Oh God I forget his name God but he just hated me He set me up one time or he tried to Tried to get a couple students to say that I had propositioned them And the chancellor to his credit would be on the side of his employees unless they proved them differently You know he got them in and they accused me of some wrongdoings The chancellor brought me in

and I said Hey you bring those students here and let them accuse me to my face He brought them in and they didn't have the guts to do it Tried to get it out of them they couldn't give it out of them I found out later on that it was this one vice chancellor that hated me

So the chancellor came to Sacramento He needed a

VASQUEZ Who was the chancellor [at the time]?

ALATORRE The chancellor was still Aldrich And you figure Orange County is the bastion of Republicanism and everything else they had a lot of influence Ronald Reagan was the governor A university in Orange County could get anything it wanted There was only one problem The medical establishment was against a teaching hospital in Orange County All of the elected representatives in Orange County were in their hip pocket so he didn't have anybody So he came to Sacramento And he came to my office And you know we had just passed a bond issue for facilities for universities and health facilities 1

1 Proposition 2 (June 1970)

VASQUEZ What year was this?

ALATORRE Nineteen seventy I think it was passed in
'70 or '72 the health facilities and you know
monies to create hospitals and all this stuff
Orange County was due theirs Well they were
fighting with the Orange County medical
establishment because the medical establishment
had interests in these hospitals these community
hospitals that they didn't want anything to
compete with them So here comes the chancellor
and the vice chancellor And in the typical
patronizing thing about you know [they
explained to me] why it was great and everything
else and I really hated that vice chancellor
And finally you know he was out there you
know telling me how to [vote] I said
Okay fine

VASQUEZ So he thought it was a great idea?

ALATORRE So what? Why do you come to me? To what do I
owe this honor? And I knew what it was that
they were all against him and he had no allies
So then they wanted to meet me to try and educate
me a little more So I stopped into Frank Fats
sat down The chancellor was bad enough but

then this other asshole that I hated started talking

Because I started telling him Well what are you doing for Mexicans? Well well you know And he started off Well you know you wouldn't want to do anything that would be unfair to Mexicans You wouldn't want them to be on the campus if they weren't qualified and everything else This is what this guy was saying So finally I just said Excuse me I said Dan you tell this son of a bitch to shut his mouth or else you know what? This meeting's over with And Aldrich turns around to him and without telling him anything the guy shut up I pulled Aldrich to the side and then I told him the story And he said Oh So he got this guy out of there So I went to Willie Brown and I said Hey Willie Orange County And see I got there before the Orange County guys got to Willie And I said Look it they want a teaching hospital Now it seems to me that we ought to be able to get something out of this So he said 'Okay This is my idea Willie He said How about if we ask for a

flat percentage of all incoming students to the medical school be blacks and Chicanos? And I said Hey you know we've got a lot of brothers out there So why don't we also get a fully-manned health clinic in the black area and the Chicano area? And I said What do you think?' He said That sounds like a good deal Now go out and sell it

So I told him [Aldrich] and I said This is the price Jesus that guy was thinking of every excuse in the world Well how about if we don't accomplish this? Well hey we don't have a deal Jeez okay So then he said Let me think about it A week later he came back and he said I think that with an aggressive campaign and outreach we can accomplish that

VASQUEZ So what did you get?

ALATORRE We got 25 percent of the enrollment [Twenty-five percent of the incoming] classes were Hispanic and black

VASQUEZ This is at the medical school at Irvine?

ALATORRE At the medical school Two fully-manned clinics in the black area and Chicano area

VASQUEZ Here in Los Angeles County?

ALATORRE In Orange County

VASQUEZ What are those clinics called?

ALATORRE Um they were health clinics community health clinics They agreed And I got them their funds And then by the time the Orange County guys came around Willie said Hey man it's too late You know 'Everybody's entitled to one thing in the budget and I promised this to Richard And we got it

VASQUEZ You mean the medical establishment when they came out?

ALATORRE Um-hmm [affirmative] The medical establishment the Orange County legislators and everything else He said Hey you're here too late man

VASQUEZ Willie was willing to buck that? They couldn't hurt him?

ALATORRE Yes They wouldn't even touch him They wouldn't even mess with Willie Because they knew that they'd get screwed And the other thing was

VASQUEZ Now this is the '72-'73 session?

ALATORRE Yes This is '73 I think

VASQUEZ The '73-'74 session?

ALATORRE Yes So then it was the law school at Boalt It had the worst record of affirmative action They had just turned down Carleton Goodlet's son at Boalt Hall Carleton Goodlet was a very noted publisher of the Oakland/Bay area And he had applied And Willie had even tried to get him in and they told him no So Willie said he reminded me he says "You know you're on the Subcommittee on Education When this item comes up I'd like you to be creative So he explained to me the problem I said Oh no problem

VASQUEZ What did 'being creative mean?

ALATORRE After he explained to me what it was that they had done and the fact that they were resistant to blacks and Chicanos he said 'Make 'em pay " All right " So then Dean of Students Newman former Supreme Court Justice Newman was the dean of the law school So he came in with his budget razzled and dazzled and everything else And I started asking him some questions about his affirmative action policy And he started giving me every reason why it was intellectually bankrupt to have a policy like this that the school

was above it and it was internationally renowned and this other shit I'm sitting there and yes it sounded very good and he kept on burying himself and burying himself So I made a motion The motion was

VASQUEZ This was a hearing a public hearing?

ALATORRE Yes a public hearing So the motion was that we fund the law school and defund the administration

VASQUEZ How did that work?

ALATORRE I told him I said "If you in your wisdom you can come up with a suitable affirmative action policy--if it doesn't violate your principles and ethics and the like--then maybe we [can] talk A week later he developed this very fashionable program and he got funded And Willie and I spoke to the graduating class that was a beneficiary of that action There were more Mexicans and blacks and women and everything else And boy Willie and I just cracked up You know we went together And I reminded him I said Hey this is the class that you and I

This should be named the Willie Brown/Richard Alatorre class of Boalt law school " [Laughter] My compadre [Luis A

Carrillo] graduated in that class Of course I got him in Richard Lujan was in that class I mean this were a lot of Chicanos man Josie González now is an immigration attorney And the Chicanos and blacks took over the graduation When we started marching in mariachis came out man It blew everybody away

VASQUEZ So you were able to see the direct results of the bartering that takes place

ALATORRE Oh absolutely um-hmm We did the same thing with the medical school And to this day Irvine has probably one of the highest percentages of minorities in every entering class And I did that at almost every medical school from that point on

VASQUEZ Tell me about your work on the Select Committee on Prison Reform and Rehabilitation that first year?

ALATORRE Well Wally Karabian was the chairman of it Wally's a lawyer and everything else He never understood the prison system And see Wally believed in you know he believed in things but he took them as far as he would take them milk them and let 'em go

VASQUEZ Is he a liberal of the ?

ALATORRE Very liberal he was a very progressive

VASQUEZ Of what strain the first strain [rhetorical] or
 the second strain [committed]?

ALATORRE I think that Wally believed and he could never
 relate because that wasn't his upbringing But
 he genuinely cared from a civil libertarian
 standpoint but could never relate because that
 wasn't part of his life You have to remember
 by the time I took that over I had already
 taught at prison so I knew the prison system
 inside and out And I believed in what I
 See I was pragmatic enough to know how far you
 could take it

VASQUEZ What was the tenor of the times regarding prison
 reform and rehabilitation?

ALATORRE I think it was somewhat fashionable But when it
 was all said and done with these were all
 criminals and they should all be treated less
 than human beings

VASQUEZ But at this point there was still some kind of
 political space and room to talk about
 [rehabilitation]?

ALATORRE Oh yes This lasted for a big part of the

seventies And when Jerry Brown came in it ended Because he believed that rehabilitation should be taken out of the vocabulary So he was a liberal governor that wiped out the entire idea of rehabilitation and made it exactly You play you pay Forget about rehabilitation because it doesn't work

VASQUEZ We'll come back to that later on when we get into that session But right now this select committee was it so select? Or was it another committee [that was] less than what it was [made out to be]?

ALATORRE It was a select committee of people that I could control that never wanted I forget even who was on it I think [Assemblyman] Alan [G] Sieroty was one of them People that very seldom ever went into the prison So pretty much it was a vehicle for me to get a staff person And it was a platform for me to go into the prisons and have a field day I mean I exposed more stuff I did the medical experimentation exposure--I mean exposé--at San Luis Obispo [State Prison] where I took in TV cameras and they filmed it live on Channel 7 I mean it was

devastating to the [administration]

VASQUEZ Tell me about that

ALATORRE You know they were basically medicating rather than [rehabilitating] Medication was a method of control And if they didn't like somebody they just medicated them And they were walking around like zombies

VASQUEZ Like in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest?

ALATORRE Prolixin you know I mean all these mind-altering drugs that just make people vegetables That's what was happening at San Luis Obispo And it was [the same] at CMC [California Men's Colony] East I had had a hearing on medical experimentation Of course it was never happening-- It's never at Oh shit the one right there in right outside of Fresno Let's see it's the California Rehabilitation

VASQUEZ Vacaville?

ALATORRE Vacaville' Which was a medical I mean you know gang rapes were going on They were you know medicating people to death You were hearing these horror stories At that time they were actually having pharmaceutical companies

that were contracting with prisoners and everything else We wiped out that entire industry during the time I was the chairman of that I mean you know medical procedures and everything else that were completely bankrupt and we exposed that and we wiped that out

VASQUEZ Was this by legislation? Using legislation or hearings or both?

ALATORRE Using legislation It took me a long time It took me years to do it but we wiped it out

VASQUEZ What bill do you think is the most important that you produced or had anything to do with?

ALATORRE In that area? I think most of it was done through exposé Because it was hard to pass things We finally did away with medical experimentation with a piece of legislation that I did ¹

VASQUEZ Do you remember what session that might have been?

ALATORRE No It was between '74 and '78 something like that I showed up one day [The

¹ A B 1592 1977-1978 Reg Sess Cal Stat ch 1250 (1977)

administration would] be terrorized of me if they ever heard I was even going into a prison But I showed up one day unannounced at Tehachapi--I mean at CMC East--and I had [TV] Channel 7 with me And these guys freaked

VASQUEZ But they let you in?

ALATORRE But they didn't think, because they had already

In their mind they had convinced themselves they weren't doing anything they weren't medicating anybody And we got there so fast and it was live And at first they didn't want to let them in and I told them I said

What do you have to hide? And I mean we embarrassed them into it So at that time it was [Daniel J] Dan McCarthy--who ended up being the head of the prison system [California Department of Corrections] maybe the last couple of years that I was in the legislature--he was the warden And he let us in

And then I knew exactly where to go I went to that unit and this poor Filipino guy man I mean I said Well you know give me an idea Like I come How would you know what medication to give me? "Oh well we have

cards And by numbers " "Oh can we see them?' And we were shooting this And they had already said We don't medicate anybody "

Right on the first card the guy picked up at random man it was right there I mean you know 'Prisoner gets out of control medicate him And it would have it And I picked up the card and I said 'Well what is this? And the guy said Well uh that's not supposed to be there And they started right on this poor Filipino I mean this poor medical attendant man they probably shipped him out But I took care of him Well that's what they wanted to do but I took care of him And card after card man I just picked out cards at random and showed them to the TV camera and every one of them I picked out was They were doing what they claimed they weren't doing

VASQUEZ How did things like this help you to make friends and influence people in your [legislative chamber]?

ALATORRE I believed in it man I really believed in it

VASQUEZ And it didn't hurt you?

ALATORRE I think it hurt me, sure

VASQUEZ How?

ALATORRE I think it hurt me Well it helped me
because they were so outrageous And still there
were people--not that they believed in you know
rehabilitation--but it was such a gross injustice
that right-thinking people would not even
tolerate it with quote 'prisoners there

VASQUEZ Do you think you could get away with doing some
of that today?

ALATORRE No

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE Because people are mean-spirited today They
really truly believe that the people that are in
jail

VASQUEZ Belong there?

ALATORRE belong there They should be treated as
[if] they are less than humans that's why
they're in prison And whatever price [they pay]
is not enough for the crimes that they
committed Granted we have a different makeup
in the prison system today But you know I
have living proof of people I helped that made
it that were rehabilitated Sure there are
others that didn't But I just philosophically

believe in that Because they eventually come out to society

Now either we want them to be better than when they went in or that we want them worse The system today perpetuates and makes them even more violent and more antisocial So we get what we deserve because we're tolerating it I believe very much And it's the only institution where we have an overrepresentative population of Chicanos

VASQUEZ What was the most important lesson that you learned your first term as a legislator?

ALATORRE I probably--and this is the truth I saw it--I went up fast and I went down fast

VASQUEZ What do you mean by that?

ALATORRE You know during Bob Moretti's tenure as speaker he allowed me to use my intelligence and use my time constructively Because that threatened people so much and because of the natural envidia [envy] that Chicanos have toward each other the Chicanos that were there felt that I was the only one getting favored treatment and they weren't getting anything They weren't getting anything

VASQUEZ That you were on a faster track maybe?

ALATORRE Much faster And there was a lot of jealousy
And so--and it's the honest-to-god truth--it came
down You know because I went with Willie
Brown for speakership Bob Moretti did not step
down when he should have He stepped down after
he lost He always believed that he could
control the election of the next speaker And we
tried to tell him that he had the power before
but once he was a lame duck nobody would ever
listen to him And he made the mistake of
holding on to that office until after he lost the
Democratic nomination for governor And because
of that we lost the speakership Willie Brown
lost it

 Everybody with the exception of myself
went against Willie Because they felt that if
Willie got elected there was going to be no room
for them So quote the "Chicano caucus went
with [Assemblyman] Leo [T] McCarthy as a way of
getting back at me They made it very clear to
McCarthy that I was to be dealt with accordingly
And pretty much for Up until the last two
years of McCarthy's tenure I never had anything
But it was a great lesson

VASQUEZ What was your greatest accomplishment do you think that first term?

ALATORRE Oh I think the two [were] definitely the medical school and the law school

VASQUEZ There was another committee we didn't talk about That was the Select Committee on Farm Labor Violence

ALATORRE That was you know following obviously my commitment to César [Chávez] And that was during the height of the conflict between the Teamsters and the [United] Farm Workers [Union] and the death of several farmworkers And it was my vehicle to expose the atrocities that were going on casting light on the fact that the living conditions and the aspirations of trying to organize farmworkers were experiencing great difficulty because of the violence that was going on The growers along with the Teamsters I mean were just the most violent people I mean that year shit they shot at me in Delano they threatened my life at different hearings that I went to

VASQUEZ Were these members of the Teamsters or people connected with them?

ALATORRE Well you know who knows? It wasn't the
Teamsters It was people both growers and
others I don't know whoever shot at me but

VASQUEZ But they actually threatened an assemblyman?

ALATORRE Oh yeah they threatened me they threatened my
life They shot at me once There were a lot of
very tense situations that I went into but I
believed [in the issue] very strongly

VASQUEZ Why don't we stop here for today

[End Tape 3 Side B]

Session 4 July 10 1989

[Begin Tape 4 Side A]

VASQUEZ Councilman the last time we met we were talking about your first assembly session We were getting into an area I think would be interesting to pursue When you arrived in the assembly in 1973 you were one of [only] five Mexican-American or Chicano legislators in the California legislature There was Peter Chacon from San Diego Alex García from Los Angeles Joe Montoya and [Assemblyman] Raymond [J] González from Kern County As I understand it Assemblyman Alex Garcia sponsored a reception of about twelve hundred people for you when you arrived there What was the feeling or the sense of the five of you of what you might do having for the first time some kind of a critical mass of representation in the state assembly?

ALATORRE Well it was the first time that we had formed a caucus I mean at one point Alex Garcia could

have [had] a meeting in [a] phone booth But now we had five members--Chicanos--in the state legislature We had a vision that we would work very closely even though we recognized that there were differences of style differences in terms of philosophy And there was kind of an agreement that we would respect each other's philosophy put that aside and deal with issues as they related to Chicanos

VASQUEZ It's obvious I think what some of the similarities might have been What were some of the differences especially ideological and of style?

ALATORRE Well I think age had a lot to do with the way that people viewed different issues I was at that time probably the youngest of any of the Chicanos that had been elected Some were very afraid to be a Chicano because of the district they represented Like Ray González basically represented a district with a small percentage of Chicanos He for no other reason than [his] district couldn't afford to take stands on a lot of issues

VASQUEZ How was it that someone of his nationality was

elected in a place like Kern County?

ALATORRE Well when he ran for office he had put together a very good campaign organization It was basically a choice between a Chicano professor or an Anglo professor And the individual [Kent H Stacey] that was running against him had some problems something [that] had come out about him And the [local] newspaper the Bakersfield Ledger--or whatever it is--whoever they endorsed pretty much was tantamount to getting elected [It] endorsed Ray González It was the biggest shock I think to the Democrats That plus the problem that the Republican had swung the election for Ray González But unfortunately two years later he lost And I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that he lost sight of his constituency--the natural constituency of Chicanos He took positions that he didn't have to He thought that by taking certain positions he would appease the whites and that they would recognize him

VASQUEZ But they were the majority

ALATORRE Oh they were a majority But in this business you can never take your base for granted And I

think a lot of people [who] have had problems in politics and that have lost in the final analysis usually it is [because] they took their base for granted Consequently they didn't you know take advantage of say in this case Chicanos [Who] were motivated to go out and vote And I would say ultimately that was probably a big factor There was no reason why he should have lost I mean he probably represented the district better than anybody else could have in terms of where most people were He didn't come out against César but pretty much he you know placated the growers He took stands that were contrary to say the Chicano community Here again thinking that what that was going to do was give him points with the Anglos And I think that was the reason he lost

VASQUEZ Was he a good legislator?

ALATORRE I think that he was a decent legislator He was basically afraid of his own shadow He shied away from any controversy He attempted to not alienate anybody if he could But his votes on some of the issues were contrary to say the farmworkers as an example And ultimately that

was his demise

VASQUEZ So there's no appeasement of people that don't really want you there in politics is that it?

ALATORRE Well when it's all said and done with especially in rural areas growers--it doesn't matter if they're Democrats or Republicans--really believe and favor voting for other Republicans Because somewhere along the way they just don't trust Democrats many times And then you add the fact that here we had a Chicano that happened to be the Democrat in a community that [had] rednecks galore big oil growers conservative people Whether it was on the issue of bilingual education which I think he took a stand contrary to bilingual education When he came out and voted against the farmworkers thinking that that was going to give him some brownie points it didn't buy him anything Because the next election they had a choice once again between a white professor [William M Thomas] and a Hispanic professor And this time around they voted for the white professor When under all standards that you could judge somebody whether he really represented quote the

majority ' he probably did as good of a job as anybody else And there was really no reason And I think he was

VASQUEZ He was an incumbent He should have

ALATORRE Yes He should have And I think that it devastated him the loss Because he felt that he did everything that was humanly possible

And we talked about it after And I told him I said Ray I feel bad because you lost But the people you bent over backwards for that you thought that you were going to win points by taking the stands you took were the ones that did you in " The newspaper that endorsed him two years before went against him There was no reason why Because he was a good legislator--if you use traditional standards

VASQUEZ Give me your assessment of the rest of the Chicano caucus--what became the Chicano caucus--at that time

ALATORRE Alex Garcia basically a very decent man He was limited He was basically very lazy And as a result of that when the real test came he lost But you still have to give him credit for the fact that he was a pioneer along with Ed

Roybal It absolutely must have been very difficult for a Chicano to be up there in the legislature basically by yourself So I give him credit for that I mean he did some good things while he was in the legislature But I think he became complacent and ultimately that affected his ability to be effective

VASQUEZ Pete Chacón?

ALATORRE Peter Chacon comes from San Diego Not very strong

VASQUEZ In what sense? He's been there a long time
He's a survivor

ALATORRE Well I'll put it to you this way he is the only guy that I know that put on a fund-raiser and lost money And it was his major fund-raiser of the year Basically Bob Moretti Willie Brown every election had to finance his election Because he could never raise money

VASQUEZ Was he able to build a functioning and effective campaign organization?

ALATORRE No I think he was basically bailed out every election by people in Sacramento We financed his elections and we had to get people in there to run his campaign You know he's the father

of bilingual education And if you ever read the bill the first bill it was probably one of the worst-drafted pieces of legislation that you'll ever want to see Vague unclear he left it to the imagination of school districts as to how they implemented it Every time he touched a bill dealing with bilingual education--because everybody knew of his limitations--it got to the point where he was the worst enemy and the worst person to carry something as controversial as bilingual education I think he's very decent I liked him He wouldn't hurt anybody that's not his nature Good family man nice kids

VASQUEZ He won on his own the first time out Was that a fluke?

ALATORRE I would probably say it was a fluke Yes I think it was a fluke You have to remember that the person [Thomas E. Hom] he won it from had gotten into

VASQUEZ Indicted

ALATORRE Yes gotten indicted and he was basically a cripple But yet I think initially he worked that district After about six years you know he basically was an absentee legislator

VASQUEZ Why has he survived?

ALATORRE Probably he's the best example of incumbency
He's never going to do anything to really get
himself into trouble And consequently he shies
away from controversy Incumbency and the fact
that he has all the money he needs to get
reelected has been a plus for him

VASQUEZ Well he's in trouble now

ALATORRE I'll tell you I think that he's going to have
great difficulty in getting reelected Because
he has given them an issue where they really
haven't had an issue in the past

VASQUEZ Who's they ?

ALATORRE I would say there's a possibility that even a
Chicano takes him on There's a woman [Celia
Ballesteros] that's a lawyer--she used to be on
the [California] State University [Board of
Trustees]--was going to run against him two years
ago Because he had declared that he was
not running for reelection So she started the
wheels in motion She's a city councilwoman
She was convinced after a lot of people talked to
her and she dropped out She would have been
very formidable And as it is whenever he's

challenged it's very costly

VASQUEZ Costly to the party?

ALATORRE Costly to the leadership And you know if he seeks reelection this next year I think he's going to be in real trouble Because see it's a district that's real funny He could be knocked out in the primary I don't think that he has to worry in the general but I think he has to worry in the primary

VASQUEZ Tell me your assessment of Joe Montoya at the time

ALATORRE I think Joe is basically a very conservative guy Always made it very clear that he had a different district that his people were different than the people living in East L A Consequently people like myself could be in the forefront of issues having to do with Chicanos and he couldn't be because of the composition of his district Where there was real differences was as an example on the question of choice for women to abortion He's very adamant and a very strong pro-lifer He has been very vocal and outspoken on that issue He's a loner You know he is quick to lose his temper many times

for no reason at all He always felt that there was a conspiracy against him

VASQUEZ By the [Democratic] party?

ALATORRE By the party and by the leadership He hated Willie Brown even though Willie Brown and Bob Moretti and the likes helped him get elected This is off the record I think he has a problem with blacks period He has a real racial problem just dealing with blacks He has a great disdain for Jews because of the Waxman-Berman connection And you know [he thought] they were always involved in some conspiracy against him His temper his temperament How could I put it? His temper his temperament his volatile behavior sometimes had no basis and was not within the realm of reality It caused him a lot of problems He basically prided himself in being independent And even though people have him you know he would turn around and screw them if he disagreed with them And he disagreed with most

VASQUEZ Well he's in some problems Now he's under indictment But how does someone like that manage to survive for so many years--and not only

survive but move quite well in both
[legislative] houses?

ALATORRE Well from a district's standpoint I think he is
another case of incumbency He's only had one
election of any consequence when he ran the
second time for the legislature after being
trounced the first time out And the fact
that he had the chutzpah to take on [Senator
Alfred H] Al Song And take him on at a time
when Al Song was extremely vulnerable because of
his

VASQUEZ Were you working with Al Song at the time that
that happened?

ALATORRE Oh no no no I mean I was already in the
legislature when that happened So you know it
was a very bitter election And you know he
survived And since that time he has had no
election of any consequence I think that he
basically represents suburban communities that
maybe have a different philosophical bent I
guess his philosophy is very consistent with the
people that live out there

VASQUEZ So tell me how the caucus came about one two
how you got to be chairman of the chairman of the

caucus--in a really short period of time

ALATORRE Sure I was the first chairman of the caucus
The caucus was created after all of us got
elected And all of a sudden we had five people
five Chicanos that were members of the
legislature We basically came together because
we felt that working as a caucus would add to our
ability and our effectiveness in whatever
pursuits we charted for ourselves We recognized
that we were individuals representing different
districts And at the time I had the luxury
allegedly of being able to take on the
controversial issues

VASQUEZ Why was that?

ALATORRE Well I think a lot of it had to do basically
with where I come from and what I believe in

VASQUEZ It's part of the stylistic difference you mean?

ALATORRE Yes really And I think the stylistic
difference between all of us the fact that
nobody else really wanted it because they were
afraid to be tagged as quote chairman of the
Chicano caucus and the ramifications of it
Because there were times when I was out there by
myself They didn't attack me for it but because

I very quickly became newsworthy and I was moving in different parts of the state there was a great deal of jealousy that resulted from it And I would venture to say that that jealousy and the fact that I made something out of the caucus was the biggest factor in the decision the members made to go against Willie Brown and go for Leo McCarthy [for speaker] Because I was out there with Willie from the very beginning They were nowhere You had Joe that disliked [blacks] He remembered back when Willie did something to him And see Joe's great at holding grudges I mean he'll go back to 1900 if something you allegedly did to him And you know he doesn't get even once he just keeps on He was allegedly offered I believe--or he thought--the majority leadership by Leo McCarthy as a condition for him delivering the other members They had a meeting of the caucus--and I was the chairman of it and they never even invited me--and it was for the purpose of moving as a body in favor of Leo McCarthy

VASQUEZ What year was this?

ALATORRE This would have been 1974

VASQUEZ So you supported Willie the first time out?

ALATORRE Oh absolutely

VASQUEZ This is an aside perhaps and maybe we could get to it in more depth later but consistently there's been a mention of what appears to be an instant or a very quick affinity between you and Willie Brown What's the basis of that?

ALATORRE I have a lot of respect for him I mean you know first of all I have a lot of respect for his intellect And I think he without a doubt is probably the smartest member of the legislature--not only today but he'll go back for many years He is just brilliant And there is just basically something that draws us close We were friends before we were colleagues in the legislature He never double-crossed me Whatever he would say he would do And I liked that quality because your word is all you have as a man It's the only thing you have as a legislator His style is very similar to mine You know he is very flamboyant I don't think that I'm necessarily flamboyant but some people would say that about me without even really knowing me He loves clothes and I love

clothes He likes nice things I like nice things And we're the two foul-mouthed legislators [Laughter]

VASQUEZ What do you think was the greatest accomplishment of the Chicano caucus?

ALATORRE The greatest accomplishment was its formation

VASQUEZ Its formation?

ALATORRE Yes

VASQUEZ The fact that it actually came about

ALATORRE That it came about and that it became a vehicle people could use you know in the legislature It became the vehicle to communicate and legislate changes that affected Chicanos

VASQUEZ And the fact that it achieved a modicum of respectability?

ALATORRE Um-hmm [affirmative] See our differences were more of style than it was anything else

VASQUEZ Ideologically you weren't that far apart on [issues]?

ALATORRE No on most things that affected Chicanos we were probably all in sync I hate to say it but it was the envidia more than anything else that created the divisiveness But after Leo McCarthy was elected then they felt at peace

VASQUEZ Why because they had gotten their way?

ALATORRE Because they got their way and because they
quote 'interrupted" my quick movement up th
political ladder

VASQUEZ What was it about you do you think that
threatened them so much? You've mentioned this
twice now

ALATORRE Probably style I mean I think a lot of it was
that I understood the system I understood how
to get things done I had friends friendships
in the legislature I probably was respected for
nothing else but for the fact that if I gave my
word they could bank on it Probably I took on
issues that maybe some of them wanted to but
were afraid to

VASQUEZ You mentioned that a successful legislator has
always got to make sure that he covers his
base How was it that you were able to take
those issues? What was it that you did for your
constituency that gave you that kind of latitude?

ALATORRE You know interestingly enough you develop your
own perceptions of the needs of people But it
is so far removed from reality working in
Sacramento Many of the things that we do that

are important--and I don't [underestimate] the importance of what happens in Sacramento--but it's not reality for the Chicano living in Boyle Heights. Because it's abstract, it's so far removed from their day-to-day existence. But I think a lot of the things that I stood for many times were very consistent with the things that many of the people in my district stood for. As far as Chicanos were concerned, I never had a problem with that base. And I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that a lot of things I did had a direct and indirect impact on Chicanos.

VASQUEZ: Looking at your record, the issues that you raised were not popular issues, but were issues that were central to Mexican-American concerns in urban areas: welfare, penal institutions, farmworker issues--well, while not an urban issue, one that got its greatest support and survived because of urban support.

ALATORRE: But I had difficulty with the northern part of the district that was more Anglo.

VASQUEZ: This is in the Eagle Rock area?

ALATORRE: Yes. I mean, even though I'm a great friend of organized labor people in the Eagle Rock area.

and to some extent even though Highland Park has changed drastically over the years you know they had a different more conservative outlook on many things They hated government They just had a disdain for big government They had a disdain for government programs for the poor and the like I think the way I balanced it off was that it was a very heavily Democratic district And there was less loyalty to the Democrats in the north but solid loyalty as you moved south and east So I mean clearly I've always been elected by Chicanos

VASQUEZ And yet in each of your elections you were opposed by either John [M] Feliz or Joe [R] Chávez

ALATORRE Yes I think the only one that really

VASQUEZ Who was your most serious contender?

ALATORRE It probably would have been Feliz only because he had H L Richardson's backing He was a cop-- for law and order And he went after me on some issues that I was involved in as far as penal reform I was always accused by him as being soft on crime ' The way I balanced that off is that I had major law enforcement organizations

which always supported me But you know I think he was the most formidable But yet when you looked at the district a Republican couldn't get elected

VASQUEZ So it was based on party?

ALATORRE I think it was based more on party yes sure

VASQUEZ Let me ask you about the 1973 decision to run again in the Fifty-fifth [Assembly District] rather than go for Twenty-fourth [Senatorial] District seat with Alex Garcia

ALATORRE Well the first time Alex Garcia ran you know interestingly enough I believed that he had paid his dues

[Interruption]

I had only been in office for two years Clearly if I would have run I would have won

VASQUEZ You [really believe] that?

ALATORRE No doubt about it Oh absolutely I mean I know I would have won

VASQUEZ Why did you decide to step aside for Garcia?

ALATORRE Because you know he had been there longer man And when it's all said and done with no matter what my visions may have been I think that he had the right to that office

VASQUEZ Was it a wise decision?

ALATORRE Yes it was a wise decision

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE Because even though I had my difficulties initially as a result of being basically put in you know the shitbox

VASQUEZ That is boxed in by your own caucus?

ALATORRE Oh yes And by the speaker You know he paid back

VASQUEZ You never made your peace with McCarthy while you were in the legislature?

ALATORRE There were attempts by him But I never liked the man

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE I thought he was basically a phony

VASQUEZ He was a liberal Democrat

ALATORRE Ah he's typical of some liberals that are great with the rhetoric but when it's all said and done with political expediency is the rule and is the way that they function--even though it may be inconsistent with quote their philosophy As long as they can justify it to themselves I mean they will prostitute their beliefs--all under the name of you know good

government or something else Which I had a real disdain for A nice man Basically honest But you know he thought he was above the fray that he was a different kind of speaker But he was as ruthless and as vindictive and as petty as other speakers that I'm sure have come before

And you also have to remember that not only did I go for Willie when we had the first speakership race but six months later when we were out trying to link up Democrats I went with Willie again So you know he probably had a double reason to try and pay me back Because I raised a lot of money and helped out a lot of the poeple when we were trying to get votes for Willie I made no bones about it And I knew that if I played that and if I lost I'd have to pay And I paid I understood it you know As a matter of fact it gave me a lot of time to really just be responsible for whatever the program was for Leo McCarthy He wanted me not to occupy my time constructively Shit I knew how to occupy my time destructively

VASQUEZ For example?

ALATORRE You know we were on the Elections and Reapportionment Committee which is the shit committee of the world. The only time it means anything is during reapportionment. I mean we were passing out bills out of that committee that were driving McCarthy up the walls'. I mean things that had no merit. Just to teach him. We were letting it out. Forcing you know his leadership to have to kill bills that were totally supposed to be consistent with what we were supposed to be all about. So I did that. I can play in the trenches as well as anybody else. And that's basically what happened. He didn't want to use my talents. fine. Then I had no allegiance to him and I went about my business.

VASQUEZ This may not be the place but quickly give me an assessment of him as a speaker. His ability as a speaker say compared to Bob Moretti.

ALATORRE Jesse Unruh ultimately was the best. He ran the most disciplined house. Bob Moretti was close. I mean Bob at any given time had X number of votes always had his forty-one. And if he needed he always had three or four

Republicans you know, in his hip pocket

VASQUEZ How?

ALATORRE Loyalties friendships Because in this business a lot of it is about friendships It is not about partisan politics Yes there is a part to it that's highly partisan Election time that becomes highly partisan ties On some issues they're highly partisan issues

Leo McCarthy used to play good government You know he was going to democratize the process And he was as much of a dictator as anybody else He believed that he would allow the development of consensus Which created chaos Because on some issues you just have to say This is the way we're going to go " But you know he would allow for chaos to take place And then when everybody was at each other then he said "Oh by the way this is the way I'd like to go "

VASQUEZ How did it differ with Bob Moretti's style who some have assessed as being someone who let people develop and do their own thing as it were?

ALATORRE See but there was a difference I mean he

allowed that to take place Bob Moretti allowed that You know he allowed a chairman of a committee to develop his area of expertise and everything else But because of that he commanded loyalty and respect Where with Leo McCarthy you didn't know where the guy was coming from at any given time And consequently he didn't command the same respect and loyalties He's a very cold person He is not one of "the boys I mean he's above that you know I mean I don't know who he would put in his corner of friends He had very few that were dead-ass loyal to the man And many times it was around the wrong thing It wasn't because they were friends of Leo McCarthy It was Well he was my boss You know that kind of thing

VASQUEZ I hear you saying that political loyalties may not be as important as personal loyalties in politics

ALATORRE Oh I believe that you have to have your personal loyalties and command that and the other will happen

VASQUEZ Let's get back to talking about the experience

with other Chicano politicians Tell me about the 1974 race in the Fifty-sixth Assembly District when Art Torres beat Phil Soto Joe Chávez Ross [H] Valencia and Raymond Rodriguez in the primary Tell me a little bit about that primary

ALATORRE Well you know you have to remember that Art Torres ran once before

VASQUEZ Yes and lost

ALATORRE And lost And interestingly enough if Art would have done the things that we had told him he might have won I mean he only lost by a little margin by a slim margin

VASQUEZ What was it that he was being told to do and ?

ALATORRE It's like we offered to give him money and everything else But he was above that You know he felt that the money should come from the district Well we said Okay fine We'll see you after you lose You know he had this misperception of reality out there He couldn't communicate his message He had a shitful of soldiers but he couldn't communicate his message to the voters

VASQUEZ How would money have made the difference?

ALATORRE The fact that he got as many votes as he did without any money just imagine what he would have gotten with money Because you know Alex didn't have a record per se I mean all you could say about Alex was Gee he's a nice man And he's been around a long time But there were holes in his record that you could have really hammered away at And you know Art was bright very articulate I believe he could have won And he acknowledged after the election 'I was wrong And from that point on he had a different perception of how you get elected

VASQUEZ Who was the most formidable opponent in that primary to him? Phil Soto who had been an assemblyman?

ALATORRE Well it was supposed to have been Phil And then to a lesser extent I guess it was Ross Valencia Because if I'm not mistaken I think Alex endorsed Ross Yes I think he did Obviously he was very bitter toward Art because he had run against him And this was the beginning of what people viewed as the machine Because the next time around I

basically financed Art's campaign People who helped me ran his campaign pretty much financed the whole thing And he got elected And that was the beginning

VASQUEZ What's the basis of those charges or those analyses of a machine? Have you tried to build a machine?

ALATORRE Yes if building a machine is supporting people and putting my money where my mouth is then maybe you could say that it is

VASQUEZ But doesn't everyone try to do that?

[End Tape 4 Side A]

[Begin Tape 4 Side B]

ALATORRE In the past what's interesting is that people used to criticize us even within our community because you know we would never help our own Because we couldn't raise money for our own and the like I get elected and I was fortunate enough to be able to develop friendships over many years and prove that Chicanos would give if they had a reason to give that Chicanos could raise money from within as well as outside of our community I believe very strongly that it wasn't enough just to say Hey you can use my

name I endorse you " But if I got into it I also put my money into it And that was viewed negatively That's the way number one the way the political arena operates That's the way the Jewish community has developed and helped to elect others Nobody criticizes the Waxman-Berman machine And even though I wasn't out deliberately developing a machine as much as I was putting money into campaigns to help elect Chicanos--something I still do and I believe in because if we don't do it for ourselves nobody's going to do it for us But you know I had to have an ulterior motive I wanted to control And I mean from the time Art got elected I wasn't there telling Art how to vote or anything else I mean it was very seldom I even asked Art to vote a certain way

VASQUEZ In the press you were referred to as the Bobsey twins --which is a rather deprecating term

ALATORRE Oh sure I don't know who came up with it but the newspaper made this alliance to be negative I mean they developed the name for it they wrote it negatively like there was some ulterior motive like it was bad that I was

trying to control and that we wanted to control who got elected in the community They said that I did--and to a lesser degree Art did--because we helped others And it got to the point where it was you know a given It had some unsavory undertones from the beginning And then from there everybody believed what was being written in the newspapers And then some of the other Chicano elected officials felt that we were a negative force and that if somebody didn't stop us that we would try and control everything Yes I'm interested in trying to get good people elected sure There's nothing wrong with that Yes I raised a lot of money And you know 90 percent of the money I raised before I got elected went for other people it didn't go for me But people saw it as something that had to be stopped that there was something wrong with it But when they wrote about others that was okay

VASQUEZ Why did this happen to you to your community and it didn't happen to the Jewish or black community?

ALATORRE I think a lot of it stems from the basic

misperception of our community They never understood our community And anybody doing what others have done in the Chicano community he must be bad He's power-hungry and driven for all the wrong reasons And the tragedy is that if they wrote about it long enough even people in our own community start saying Oh I don't want a puppet I've never asked [that of] anybody Yes I put a lot of money into it But damm it I never asked people Hey you're going to vote this way or else No I figured that once they got up there Man if there was a mistake that I made it's that I didn't stay on top of them In hindsight that is probably the greatest mistake

VASQUEZ Give me an example if you can think of one

ALATORRE [Assemblyman Charles M] Chuck Calderón

Probably the greatest example I mean so long as I was there he'd vote halfway decently And yet the real tragedy is that he felt that nobody respected him because of the same fallacy that took place in the seventies--there was only room for one Mexican and he wasn't allowed his own identity I never smothered the guy You know

periodically I'd ask him Man for your own good This is for your own political future man Don't be stupid And inevitably he would say Okay But it wasn't anything that I asked him to do that was bad for his political future

VASQUEZ By 1974 reading newspaper accounts you and Art Torres were pretty much written off by most observers as not having much of a future because you were constantly bucking the leadership of the party and the legislature and in fact criticizing both the speaker and Democratic governor What was the basis of the criticisms that you had against Leo McCarthy and Jerry Brown?

ALATORRE Against Leo McCarthy I think stemmed from the fact that I never liked the man

VASQUEZ But you did it in the name of the community

ALATORRE And it was I mean I'll give you an example-- same example I'll cite to you with Jerry Brown-- the farmworkers I mean all of a sudden here this man [McCarthy] gets elected And you know he's supposed to be the champion for the poor and progressive and everything else And all of a sudden you know he feels he has to go to bed

with the growers

VASQUEZ In what way?

ALATORRE He had his perception of what was good for farmworkers And it was not what was good for the United Farm Workers Because he thought that he would chart a middle ground and gain you know points with quote the agricultural community --who would have liked to have seen him dead But he thought that by trying to be this objective person he would gain favor from you know the growers And when it came down to the drafting of a bill to provide secret-ballot elections for farmworkers he wanted to come up with his bill that was basically not in the best interests of the farmworkers Coming up with a bill that was tailor-made and taken out of the National Labor Relations Act and not recognizing the difference in the agricultural community It may have been good for the trade union movement but it wasn't good for farmworkers who were the poorest of the poor

Jerry Brown the same thing I mean he double-crossed Cesar at one point And it wasn't until I traveled up and down the state of

California I mean I went to rallies in every part from northern Yolo County all the way down to Calexico speaking at farmworker rallies and basically just bombing Jerry Brown and bombing Leo McCarthy We got both of them to cave in But the one condition was that they didn't want me to carry the final bill Because quote I was "too identified with César And they wanted to get somebody that wasn't quote as identified with César

VASQUEZ Was this a party decision? Was it a hardball political decision?

ALATORRE Oh it was a hardball decision by Leo McCarthy I'll show you how petty the motherfucker was you know to clean that up is the day that we were passing the farmworker bill he didn't even want me to be allowed to speak on the very bill that you know we worked to draft That was a subtle way of paying me back Jerry Brown the same thing He didn't want to give me credit Because basically I kicked Jerry Brown's ass up and down the state of California And it worked man It was issues like that

VASQUEZ It tested your loyalty to the issue didn't it?

ALATORRE Sure And you know what? I didn't give a shit about Leo McCarthy and I didn't give a shit about Jerry Brown Because the issue was more important to me than getting brownie points with either Jerry Brown--who I thought was an absolute imbecile brilliant [in some ways] but just you know out to lunch--and Leo McCarthy who was just the typical liberal rhetorician who would sell out his mother if he had to for his own political future

VASQUEZ I want to get into it later in the interview in more detail but I think it's a good time to contrast the question of loyalties to an issue When you supported Willie Brown and he was successful in his fight for the speakership--this was already in '80-'81--Cesar Chávez not only disagreed with you but went to the point of sending farmworker representatives to picket you and Art Torres because he wanted you to go for Berman How could you oppose Cesar Chávez whom you'd worked so hard for one and how could he oppose your assessment of that choice?

ALATORRE I think he was into it so far--and he was into it because he hated Leo McCarthy--and Howard Berman

was of his making And I mean I know Cesar man I mean once he gets into something You know he got more kicks out of having somebody that he felt was made by him and would be dead-ass loyal I told César that he was wrong I told him why he was wrong Because when it's all said and done with Howard Berman as nice of a guy as he is he would have double-crossed César as fast as anybody else would have if it would have meant his election as the next speaker And Willie Brown had been with him [Chávez] for a long time But because he [Chávez] had given his commitment to Berman he couldn't get out of it César called me but first he called Art And Art was afraid to return the phone call

Now you put this out I'll give you the content this is exactly how it happened See one thing that César always had is that you know he really has a big pair of balls I mean he saw the fact that shit I mean I was cutting my own throat Not only because I believed in it but because I had a loyalty and a commitment to César and the farmworkers That transcended

politics Fuck it I mean I could care less about it Then he called me And see for me I was only with Howard Berman to fuck Leo McCarthy Because I hated Leo I didn't trust Howard Berman Because I knew him I mean he was like Henry Waxman--the biggest cutthroat disloyal motherfucker I've ever met in my life He was cut out of the same mold He was a good legislator and he was good on issues and everything else but he was the same

And he [Chávez] called me on Christmas Eve man and he said How are you doing? Eh not bad César Had a fifteen-minute conversation basically telling me why he thought that Howard Berman [should be speaker] I said Hey wait a minute César I want to make it very clear to you He is as rotten a motherfucker as Leo McCarthy I understand why you want to kill Leo McCarthy And if you put it in that context hey no problem! I'm with you You don't have to convince me Because I hate the man as much as you do I'm not doing it because I think this guy's any better And he laughed

So then he couldn't get ahold of Art And

they started to put the pressure on Because César always knew where to put the pressure It was a waste of time to put it on me Because hey I would do the opposite Whereas he knew Art He was like his father And he knew that Art would fold And once that Art took the call

No he didn't even take the call I got him down to my house and I said Art the old man's been trying to get ahold of you Oh no' I've made a commitment' I can't do it' and dot-dot-dot And I said "Art cut the fuckin' bullshit man He has basically made you the good Mexican And that was Leo because he played the divide and conquer with Art and myself And I'll tell you Art fell in love with it man He fell in love with his ability to speak and the fact that they were playing divide and conquer Not that Art would do anything to fuck me but he was enjoying where he was

VASQUEZ The attention and

ALATORRE The attention and that he recognized how smart he was Leo had promised him a prominent role in the house I think he promised him the majority leadership So he was there But you know

we're family friends And I told him I said
Hey cut the fuckin' bullshit The man [Chavez]
wants us to go down to San Jose and you've got
to tell him in person When we got there man
fuckin' Art was folding And César knew it And
he played it just right with him Put enough
pressure on him Because he knew that once he
asked him he was going to have a hard time
And you know I told Art on the way down I
said You know that you ain't going to be able
to deal "No but I made a commitment I
said Hey Art

VASQUEZ Who was he committed to?

ALATORRE Well at that point in his life he was committed
to himself You know? Definitely would never do
anything overtly to screw me But he then became
the rising star and he enjoyed it See I had
already seen the top and the bottom And for me
it was all bullshit man You know at the point
where I was at I was enjoying being the
muckraker

VASQUEZ Of being on the outs?

ALATORRE Of being on the outs Because you know it
didn't affect my ability to raise money it

didn't affect my ability to get publicity So I was having a good time And Art fell in love with being quote a 'good legislator Well that was all bullshit And Art found out So we met with him [Chávez] man and I sat back there And I told him [Torres] I said You don't have to tell me now But I'm going to tell you what you're going to do ' No I can't do it and everything else man

We [went] to the meeting and César started his good government thing And I told him César wait a minute man Let me make this one real clear The only difference between Leo McCarthy and Howard Berman is one has fucked you and the other one hasn't But don't fall in love [with the idea] that this guy won't fuck you So as long as you understand that Cesar laughed he said Well you know And Cesar got into his making Howard Berman So he became invested in Howard Berman

VASQUEZ He didn't see a chance of Willie Brown winning?

ALATORRE No because it was only Leo McCarthy and Howard Berman That's what it was So man I mean here was a chance [for Chavez] to make the

next speaker and to really have some real control And he knew he could I mean he had already butchered Jerry [Brown] so he knew how to put the pressure on Jerry But the legislature man was too important because if anything ever got out of the assembly shit it was going to be flying out of the senate And he couldn't trust Jerry Brown not to fuck him you know because he was trying to play both sides So hey César went through his whole rhetoric about the history and everything else and said "I'd like to have you support Howard Berman But I never played a role in getting votes for Howard Berman or anything else Fuck for me it was just business man Business man I didn't like him anymore I just hated Leo more But I saw Howard for what he was Art was with Leo and out there making phone calls And it was understood that he was going to be the majority leader because he [Leo] was going to cut Howard Berman's balls And then he [Torres] had to call Leo and tell him Hey I'm sorry but I got to be with Howard Berman ' I mean it was devastating for Leo McCarthy I was on the other

line and I was cracking up How could you do this? Jackie We're family And Art felt like dogshit man Because he really had no reason man And what he said 'Well I'm doing it because I'm not going to let Richard be alone anymore So he made me the bad guy And you know fuck I didn't give a shit about making points with him anyway I laughed at Art on the way back I said You chicken-shit motherfucker

Then he jumped and became an active participant on Howard Berman's side And I mean shit he was making phone calls And he cut his deal he was going to be majority leader So he had the same job under both of them I never made a fucking phone call I didn't give a shit man I mean if he got it he got it if he didn't shit I was in no worse shape Howard couldn't pull it off And Leo wanted to stay in there man I mean he was trying to win under any [conditions] I mean he was a lame duck he was through man He didn't understand he was through And finally I wasn't in there because I was still with Howard Then Willie

emerged Well Willie never called me or
anything else Because he knew

VASQUEZ He was also on the outs as it were

ALATORRE Oh yes Willie was on the outs but he was
still chairman of [the Committee on] Revenue and
Taxation So I mean, you know he was still
doing all right I was in the fucking shitter
man I mean he was the guy but I'm the one
that got it worse than he did And I always do
make fun of Willie for that

And then Willie emerged And basically in
the meeting they told Leo Hey Leo you know
what? It's over man I want you to understand
that Now we've got to put it together to get
our own We got to get somebody from this
operation to be speaker Because then it
became anybody but Howard Berman And then one
day Willie called me and he said Hey brother
what's happening? And I said 'Hey man don't
waste your time What? Have you learned to
count? Because you know you thought you
learned the first time motherfucker you didn't
even learn math the first time Now just tell
me man " And he said 'I'm there man He

said, "Obviously with you And if you can get me Art man I think we got X number here and I think we're going to do it brother I said Hey count me in brother "

And then we had a meeting with Wally Karabian whom Art became fast friends with And I mean, Art didn't even know what hit him Because he was adamant "I am with Howard and I can't And my word isn't going to be worth a shit if I change and everything else So I let him play his game I spent about two hours and I mean he was giving every song and dance And I finally told him--it's the first time I ever told him--I said 'Art, I've never asked you for anything man So this time [yelling] 'Jesus Christ' But goddamn I mean how can I do it'? And I said Hey how'd you do it the first time man? [yelling] Yeah but I mean jeez I'm going to be looked as a whore I said Hey man I didn't tell you to fucking kill yourself I didn't "

They knew who put it together They knew it was me Because they knew Art had nothing going with Willie But they knew of my friendship with

Willie So as much as they hated me they understood But the one that they never forgave was Art Never forgave him man Because he had no reason They had offered him all these things and everything else And I mean to this day they hate his ass man

VASQUEZ Who is this?

ALATORRE The Bermans They feel he's the one that cost them the election--which is not true Because Howard couldn't have done it He couldn't get the votes man

VASQUEZ What was the conflict between Waxman and Berman that some attribute as part of the reason for that loss to Willie Brown?

ALATORRE Well the dislike goes back to Moretti Because Waxman cold-bloodedly fucked Bob Moretti He had committed to Bob Moretti [for governor] But according to Henry Waxman he never had He [Moretti] had never asked And consequently he had never given a commitment And when he went with Jerry Brown it was devastating to Bob And that's when we had told Bob I said Yes you dumb motherfucker He [Waxman] had no loyalty to anything It's true

man No loyalty to nothing man Just to himself and whatever was politically expedient for his little group They [Berman's supporters] didn't even waste their time with me man Then they started to put pressure on Art to see if he'd fold They didn't even bother with me The only hope they had was Art And they felt with enough pressure he would fold Of course I had to babysit him the whole time [laughter] I did I was out there the whole fucking time holding his hand

VASQUEZ So the person that was getting all these job offers ended up with what at the end? He didn't seem to have done all that well

ALATORRE Yes

VASQUEZ Was there animosity on the part of Willie Brown towards Art Torres as a result of that?

ALATORRE Oh he knew the reason that Art came with him was because of me Because it's friendship man Art's never had that with Willie Because down deep Art has a problem with blacks anyway

VASQUEZ Well I wanted to follow that out as a concept of loyalty and conflicting issues and sticking with the issues We'll have a more institutional

discussion about it later

ALATORRE Um-hmm [affirmative]

VASQUEZ I know you have to rush off to a meeting and I
don't want to keep you any longer for this
session

[End Tape 4 Side B]

[Session 5 July 15 1989]

[Begin Tape 5 Side A]

VASQUEZ We were talking about leadership in the legislature But there is one area we hadn't touched on You've made several allusions to your relations with Governor Jerry Brown both with your committee duties and with your own community the people you represented in the assembly Give me an assessment of Governor Brown's impact on Democratic politics and on what one could loosely call the liberal agenda in California

ALATORRE I think people viewed Jerry Brown as a liberal He probably did more in certain arenas to change the institutions in the judicial system appointments of top-level directors managers He probably did more in the area of affirmative action as it related more to women and to some extent to Chicanos than probably any other single governor That is on the one hand But

then on the other hand if Jerry Brown started as a liberal he probably ended up [otherwise]

Because he was [more] quick to follow whatever direction the wind was blowing than probably any other person I'll give you an example

After Proposition 13 passed you would have sworn the next day that he was the author of Proposition 13 the [Paul] Gann and [Howard] Jarvis initiative ¹ But in terms of the judicial system he truly opened up the process and appointed Hispanic men and women to the judiciary up and down the state That was good and bad

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE The bad was that many times he appointed people in areas where they didn't have a chance in the world of ever getting reelected when they were up for it

VASQUEZ An example?

ALATORRE Example [Robert] Bob López Bob López was a judge in East L A Bob López should have never been appointed in East L A He had great

1 Proposition 13 (June 1978)

difficulty in relating to that community He came out of West Los Angeles and probably should have stayed in West Los Angeles As it turned out he had great difficulty with his reelection

Another example in terms of blacks

[Assemblywoman] Yvonne [W] Brathwaite Burke Great appointment But it was a great appointment in the wrong area She didn't have a prayer of getting reelected in the [Los Angeles County Supervisorial] district to which he appointed her [Fourth District] And I can cite you example after example of that So on the one hand he did a great deed But then on the other hand it was a cruel hoax Because of the areas in which he placed these individuals Jerry Brown's appointees have probably fared worse than any previous governor Because of their inability to be elected when they ran more people were defeated In the past the [California] District Attorneys Association and the like never you know very seldom ever got involved unless there was a glaring example of somebody that was unfit What you saw is that people who ran against appointees of Jerry Brown

used the fact that they were appointed by Jerry Brown and that they were soft on crime ' I mean this did more to politicize the judiciary than probably anything that I have seen in recent times

VASQUEZ It's hard I know to find and see through people's motives or to characterize people's motives But was this a case of naivete? Was it a case of just wanting to use what patronage [is available] to the governor to assuage certain groups? Or was it an honest effort to democratize and open up areas that heretofore hadn't been open to minorities?

ALATORRE To an extent I think he believed in democratizing the process But he was extremely naive in the way that he went about democratizing the process Because once that appointment would be done he'd wash his hands of that And there were times when he would even try and distance himself from the people that he appointed I think he was very very naive when he started I think he started under the guise that he was going to revolutionize the way government was run He basically ran against government And

the tragedy is that he was part of government
And he did more to tear the system down than he
did to really change the system You know there
are people I've seen more and more people who
have been elected tearing down the very
institution that they're running for And once
that they're in they continue to do so And
this is on both sides of the aisle liberal as
well as conservative

VASQUEZ Republicans as well as Democrats?

ALATORRE Exactly Republicans as well as Democrats I
mean I think that Jerry Brown was probably one
of the most naive governors that I've ever met
And yet I think he was one of the most
intelligent governors that we have had in recent
history But he could not implement the ideas
that he had He couldn't make them work He was
anti-legislature for a long time He had no
relationship [with it] whatsoever If anything
he would criticize the very body that he was
attempting to get to pass many of [his]
reforms But then again you can't take away
from the fact that he did a lot of good for
people who up to this time were shut out of the

process

VASQUEZ There was an especially acrimonious criticism on your part along with I believe Art Torres when Mario [G] Obledo was appointed [secretary of health and welfare] What was the basis of your criticism?

ALATORRE See it wasn't that we criticized Mario Obledo No We basically criticized the process that he used There was a lot of talented people in the state of California And yet he went out of state and selected somebody when there were people that really could have made a greater impact than Mario The real tragedy

VASQUEZ Why? Because they had more of a base here?

ALATORRE Not only a base but that had an understanding and an expertise in the area that he was put into Basically that's another cruel hoax Mario Obledo while probably one of the kindest and gentle and caring men I have ever come across was basically isolated and was totally ineffective in the job as secretary for health and welfare I mean that is a classic example of an appointment that was destined to fail Because the very agency [to which] he appointed

an ethnic and racial minority was the very agency that he [Brown] was decimating during his tenure of office

VASQUEZ How so?

ALATORRE Cutting funds from that body And then he had to go out leaving Mario Obledo to justify the actions of the secretary I mean it got to the point where [department] directors under him [Obledo] paid absolutely no attention to him They had their own constituency that they answered to and never bothered to even follow the chain of command [Brown] put him there and isolated him And I really believe that he justified a lot of things and felt he could get away with it because he had a person like Mario Obledo as secretary of health and welfare He was the fall guy Instead of giving him authority--he didn't give him authority--he just put him there isolated him and let him basically dangle and hang out to dry

VASQUEZ How did all this impact on Democratic fortunes and politics?

ALATORRE On the one hand you had an Hispanic appointed who was probably one of the first Hispanics ever

appointed to a cabinet-level position But it was an appointment with absolutely [no] power and influence It was only a name and not in reality Because one of the bad things about Jerry is that he wanted to make all the decisions When you are a sitting governor you have to allow for the delegation of responsibility And he would never allow that Consequently he was caught up with all the minutiae of the day-to-day operations of government He was overloaded and swamped And that's why things fell through the crack that's why things were not done Because that was basically the way that Jerry operated in the early part of his administration

VASQUEZ Through whom? Did he have a small group around him?

ALATORRE He had basically yes a very small group He brought in his guru Jacques Barzagli Nobody ever understood what he did but I mean he was one of his advisers To an extent Gray Davis was in there and he supposedly was one of his advisers Then you had Justice [J Anthony] Kline who was another one of his advisers But

in the final analysis, he made the decisions
And it was difficult for him to make decisions
that had to be made rapidly He would take a
long time And many times by the time he made a
decision either the problem had been resolved or
the problem had gotten so bad that it was almost
unresolvable

VASQUEZ Example

ALATORRE I think a lot of the health and welfare cuts got
to a point where the problem was magnified And
he then just turned around and blamed it on
somebody else

VASQUEZ Are taxes another example?

ALATORRE Sure I mean I think many of the initiatives
that came up yes the legislature was
criticized But there was also no leadership
from the governor no indication as to where the
governor was at He had the basic philosophy
that he never commented on legislation till it
got to his desk Well you know for a
legislator I mean that's horrible because

VASQUEZ From the same party?

ALATORRE Same party sure I'm saying is it especially
horrible for Especially when you had

reforms that you felt were important And because there wasn't any input initially by the time you got it to the governor's desk things that maybe could have been taken care of weren't All because you couldn't get any direction from the office on the first floor

VASQUEZ It's important to get some kind of signal from the governor is that it?

ALATORRE Well yes Especially if you have say something that is important If from the people that cover certain specified fields and departments you couldn't get a signal of something that maybe was deficient or troublesome to the governor's staff you had no ability to correct it

VASQUEZ Did you ever experience that with any of your legislation say in prison reform or labor or welfare or anything?

ALATORRE It wasn't until as an example the governor involvement--direct involvement--in the farm labor issue that you could get any direction as to where he was going And once you did of course he would not seek input from anybody I guess he had a great need to think up these ideas

himself And whether they were ideas that had any reality in the day-to-day operations of a given area or not many times he just lobbed them And he would say 'Well you know I'm testing the waters You know I think this would be a good idea "

VASQUEZ Did you find this irresponsible?

ALATORRE I found the governor to be initially very insulated It was irresponsible of course And many times it was the managers who were running the state of California

VASQUEZ By managers you mean department heads?

ALATORRE Yeah it could be the middle-level civil servants You know I'm of the opinion

VASQUEZ Why? Because there was not clear initiatives coming from the top?

ALATORRE No initiatives at all coming from the top And that was a problem Sometimes you would find that you had [cabinet] secretaries moving in one direction and the governor's office moving in the opposite direction I think prison reform was a classic example I think he developed the attitude that rehabilitation was a term which by its mere definition was outmoded and the purpose

of the penal system was to punish period One time--I was obviously actively involved in this area--I saw him at a restaurant in Hollywood I was involved I guess, at that time in medical experimentation [in prisons] I was having a conversation with him He turned around and you know he was playing with a napkin And he drew a picture of a face looking out of some bars with a smile And he said "This is what I want happy prisoners ' I looked at him and I said Are you crazy? And he said Oh you liberals you don't know what you're talking about And it was really tragic because here you had a man who allegedly was a voice of a new direction in politics And depending on the issue he was more reactionary than many of the right-wingers And he exploited issues I don't know really what the man believed in Because his beliefs would change depending on [which direction] the wind was blowing

VASQUEZ With hindsight do you still find that to be the case? He's still very active in the Democratic party

ALATORRE I think that he is suffering for the reputation

that he developed among people who reacted to his moonbeam type of politics And I think that Jerry Brown toward the end of his administration began to mature He began to see the world for what it was I'll give you an example of what an insensitive person he was I remember flying back to Los Angeles And on the plane was a labor leader--now an international labor leader--whose name I am really not interested in revealing He was seated there so I sat down next to him and we began to talk And he had just come back from spending a couple of days in Sacramento He was really frustrated and just venting his feelings about the governor A person that spent a lot of money on his campaign Probably a lot of it was because of his father [Governor Edmund G Pat Brown Sr] He knew the father and knew Jerry when he was growing up He was telling me how disappointed he was with the governor--not only as a governor but as a man His father had come in to see him and he kept his father waiting outside in the waiting room for almost two hours He couldn't believe that Because he was

going to spend a couple of days in Sacramento he had been to Governor Brown's birthday party

VASQUEZ The elder?

ALATORRE The elder senior And his mother--meaning Jerry Brown's mother [Bernice Brown]--told this labor leader She said 'If you see Jerry could you tell him to call me? I haven't talked to him for a long time And that I think speaks to Jerry Brown the person and ultimately Jerry Brown the man and Jerry Brown the governor If he is so insensitive with his father who basically made Jerry Brown he was Edmund G Brown Jr and he rode in not only as community college board of trustee secretary of state but ultimately became governor on the name It didn't surprise me Because I found Jerry Brown to be exactly that You know he treated his friends worse than he treated his enemies That's not to say that you are going to just bend over backwards for your friends But you know in life you should if the cause is right if the issue is correct you should at least pay special attention to people that are allegedly your friends That was disconcerting to me but it

wasn't surprising to me

I'll give you another story and it's very true When Jerry Brown came back from law school and he was contemplating going into the political arena he put together a meeting at a large law firm made up of young people I went along with a friend of mine who was invited There were people who now are retired judges There were people there that are very influential and doing very well in both the judiciary as well as in the private sector

The meeting was called by Jerry Brown to talk about his race and his entering the political arena The first hour of this meeting was spent on whether he should run as Jerry Brown or as Edmund G Brown Jr He was arguing that everybody knew him as Jerry Brown and he should run as Jerry Brown And I remember one friend of mine who now is a federal judge telling me Do me a favor Tell Wally'--this was Wally Karabian-- never to invite me to a meeting like this This guy's crazy But I think it speaks to the type of guy that Jerry Brown was I liked him as a person And I can

tolerate him But I would never consider him to be a friend because I think he has great difficulty with friendships

VASQUEZ He is now the chairman of the state Democratic party What does that portend for California Democratic politics?

ALATORRE Well I mean I'll cite you an example He ran for the chairmanship of the party and won He spent a lot of money was better organized and he won Basically it should have been a cakewalk But because of the fear that many people had up and down the state of California of having to carry the baggage of Jerry Brown he had a contested race It was more a vote against than it was for somebody else His first entrance I guess you could say into an election supporting a candidate took place in 1989 in the city council election in Los Angeles

VASQUEZ [The race against City Councilman] Ernani Bernardi?

ALATORRE Ernani Bernardi versus Lyle Hall He endorsed Lyle Hall--a very fine man nice man former president of the United Firefighters of Los Angeles He forced a runoff in that councilmanic

district Jerry Brown the weekend before the election endorsed Lyle Hall I believe very strongly that that endorsement cost Lyle Hall his election

VASQUEZ Why? Because of [the political] baggage that you talk about?

ALATORRE Because of the leftover feeling that people have --rightfully or wrongfully If people did not watch television they heard it on the radio because it [Brown's endorsement] ran for three days The fact that he didn't think twice about getting involved could be blamed not only on him but also on the campaign manager He got involved in conservative San Fernando Valley where there is a strong reaction against him And as a result and I really believe that because it wasn't money that caused the defeat of Lyle Hall If you are to pick a single issue or [event] I believe it was Jerry Brown's endorsement that caused Lyle Hall the election That is an example of the type of reaction that Jerry Brown engenders in people

VASQUEZ You made an allusion to it but maybe you want to expand or summarize his effectiveness in dealing

with the legislature while he was governor--at least, during the time that you served

ALATORRE I would say that for about six years it was totally ineffectual. The last year or so it improved. And the reason it improved was because he knew or finally he was educated to the fact that if he wanted to get things done he had to develop a relationship with the legislature--something that he should have known going into the office. I think he probably knew it because I'm sure his father taught him that. But he believed that he was above even dealing with the legislature. And consequently I think many issues that were happening during that period of time probably happened in spite of Jerry Brown.

VASQUEZ Give me an example. Because there was a period of retrenchment and I find your record full of issues that were not the most popular things to be taking up in the late seventies.

ALATORRE Oh housing policy. Anything [having] to do with human and social issues for the poor for the working class were things that you know he didn't want anything to do with. That was him. I think things that he took credit for most of

them were really issues that were championed by others But he was probably best at coopting issues and making them his issues and convincing people they were his

VASQUEZ Reconstruct for me if you will from beginning to end the case of legislation on behalf of or [which] was meant to benefit farmworkers in California

ALATORRE Sure About three or four years prior to the enactment of secret-ballot elections for farmworkers John Burton--and I think it was my first term in office--introduced the secret-ballot-election bill for farmworkers ¹ I believe that it got out of committee and ultimately died on the floor There was a period of time where there were mixed feelings by

VASQUEZ Did you coauthor that by the way?

ALATORRE Yeah I was the principal coauthor There were mixed feelings I think for a while by the union as to whether in fact they should have legislation or not Obviously they couldn't do anything under the Reagan administration Then

1 A B 3370 1973 Reg Sess

when Jerry Brown took office they felt that there was a ray of hope that he would be sympathetic to the issue I introduced a bill that provided secret-ballot election for farmworkers took into consideration the unique nature of agriculture and of the labor-farmworker issue which was different than things under the National Labor Relations Act I introduced it because of my involvement and non-relationship with Jerry Brown and well as Leo McCarthy and because

VASQUEZ Clarify that for me

ALATORRE Well I mean Leo McCarthy

VASQUEZ Did you do it in spite or did you ?

ALATORRE I felt this way that putting personality aside hate me is one thing or dislike me or want to punish me " But here was an issue that had all the equity in the world We are dealing with people who are the poorest of the poor We are dealing with people that have been exploited that have been killed And all they were asking for was this basic right that other working men and women had prior to the enactment of the legislation Jerry Brown at that time didn't know exactly where he was as it related to

the farmworkers Then all of a sudden Jerry Brown out of the clear blue skies drafts a bill He gave the ingredients to his legal secretary Tony Kline Tony Kline then fashioned a bill over one weekend and got an author to introduce that bill I believe that the author was Howard Berman who was an ally of Jerry Brown As a result of the introduction of the bill--which outraged César it was an absolute outrage to the farmworkers--we began the process of galvanizing support for my bill in opposition to Jerry Brown's bill

VASQUEZ What was outrageous about that bill?

ALATORRE It was pretty much tailored after the National Labor Relations Act ¹ which was not functional for the seasonal nature of agriculture Both [pieces of] legislation were introduced about two weeks before both bills were to be heard I began the process with César to have rallies up and down the state to basically ask for support for my bill and to denounce Jerry Brown's bill The swing throughout the state of California

1 29 U S C § 151 (1959)

really started taking hold And Jerry Brown was getting kicked [around] up and down the state by supporters of the farmworkers Basically supporters of Jerry organized labor who was supporting my bill against Jerry Brown's bill Very delicate negotiations started taking place in Sacramento And those negotiations were basically to craft another bill And that bill if there could be some agreement was the vehicle But not to allow for my bill because they felt that that bill was already tainted

VASQUEZ By what?

ALATORRE By the fact that it was too closely identified with the union And Jerry Brown thinking that his bill was the answer but it wasn't would require another vehicle So the negotiations took place for about a week and even into the weekend During that weekend--and it was I think the weekend before the hearing on the measure--the only thing that was basically requested was that my name not appear as an author It was under the guise that I was too closely allied and by that tie it would poison the efforts to successfully pass the legislation

VASQUEZ Allied with César Chávez?

ALATORRE Yes Even though the negotiations were with César's legal counsel between Jerry Cohen and the administration Jerry Brown really in his mind believed that he knew labor law and he knew everything He was the kind of guy who was a quick study You would pile up information in front of him He would read it digest it and then as a result of that become an expert Even though Jerry Cohen would tear him upside the head even Jerry Cohen acknowledged that He's not dumb For not knowing anything before he certainly knew something as a result of his quick study So as a result of those negotiations basically the Oh I know what it was What had happened is that my bill had already come out of the Policy Committee was being heard before Ways and Means and I believed that the other bill also came out So what happened is that a compromise was struck There were compromises and issues that would come up that needed amendments throughout the process The only condition was that my name not be put on it

Leo McCarthy because of my relationship

with Leo and being basically nonexistent And I take it back it wasn't Howard Berman It might even have been Leo McCarthy that was the co-author of it You'll have to check that but my memory fails me now So I guess we were going after both of them And the compromise was Howard Berman as the author for Jerry Brown's legislation And you know Howard's a bright labor lawyer You know both of them wanted nothing to do with me

I'll tell you how petty it got When we struck the deal when the bill came out of Ways and Means--and this was already national news because it was the first state that was moving in the direction of providing secret-ballot elections When the bill got to the floor of the house it was timed Because it was national news that they would take it up at I believe about 4 00 in the afternoon so that--or 5 00--so that there could be live coverage for the evening news The only provision that Leo insisted was that I not be allowed to speak Which you know outraged and pissed César off Finally that was negotiated And then I remember Leo coming to me

when I was on the floor And he said you know
I really want you to speak on this bill even
though I knew in the background he was trying to
do me in

So as it all turned out we got it out of
the assembly barely It went to the senate
where a lot of negotiations started taking place
with the growers

VASQUEZ Who carried it in the senate?

ALATORRE Who would have carried it in the senate? Um it
was either Dave Roberti would have carried
it or Shit at that time maybe even George
Moscone was on it I think Moscone was the one
who carried it in the senate

So basically what happened was that then we
brought in the growers then the negotiations
went around the clock for an entire weekend And
what it showed me was here the growers had all
these high-priced attorneys And shit Jerry
Cohen and myself we ate them alive Because
they agreed to things that we knew when they
thought about it were outrageous

VASQUEZ Like?

ALATORRE The whole question of secondary boycotts being

silent on it even though they thought it was outlawing secondary boycotts the whole question of farm-labor contractors and being outlawed the seasonal nature of it the creation of this [Alatorre-Zenovich-Dunlap-Berman] Agricultural Labor Relations Act [of 1975] ¹ the preface of the bill that made it very clear that this was a bill for farmworkers and for protecting their rights and not even talking about agriculture We cut a deal And the bill passed

And Jerry Brown wanted all of the credit Because that was him I remember that him insisting on things And you know César basically fighting Finally I told César I said Hey man I'm going to be very honest with you César Yes it's hurtful Yes I busted my ass on this thing because I believe in it And here you have basically two pimps that don't believe in anything but whatever is politically expedient and want to hog the glory I told him The issue is more important than me And

¹ A B 1 1975-1976 Third Ex Sess Cal Stat ch 1 (1975)

if it is me that's causing the problem then
hey I'll step aside man Because the issue
was more important I really believe that César
would have gone to the mat But I think that
Jerry was so entrenched in the idea that he
basically didn't want to share credit with any-
body That's kind of the basic way that he was

VASQUEZ Let's change ground a bit and talk a little bit
about legislative reform Let's see if this
works Let me ask you some people have said
that Proposition 13 was about and against
politicians and not about taxes Is that true
do you think?

ALATORRE I think Prop 13 was the basic frustration that
people had And I think a lot of it was
ignorance about on the one hand wanting
everything and yet on the other hand not wanting
big government as well as the inability on the
part of the legislature to craft you know tax
reform Because number one we could never reach
a consensus and number two whatever direction
we would move had an impact on large institutions
that fought any tax relief

VASQUEZ Now that was four years after the Fair Political

Practices Act in 1974 ¹ And yet you still had this kind of concern Let me ask you this What was the setting as you remember--because it was early in your career--what was the context or setting that brought this Fair Political Practices Act and the ensuing [Fair Political Practices] Commission [FPPC] to being?

ALATORRE As to the best of my recollection I think it was the basic frustration

[End Tape 5 Side A]

[Begin Tape 5 Side B]

ALATORRE I think it's the basic inability on the part of the legislature to reach a consensus on political reform as well as--and this was during a period of time where at the national level there was this scandal going on

VASQUEZ Watergate

ALATORRE Watergate So we then got people that believed that political reform was necessary you know through the regulation of lobbyists and trying to control their influence how much they could spend reporting and the like That qualified

1 Proposition 9 (June 1974)

Watergate the hysteria about it and the fact that there was no organized opposition to it Because to oppose it was to be probably pictured as condoning some of the things that had gone on at the national level and to an extent at the state level So it passed

Did it bring about reform? The idea is to open up the process and that's what reform is supposed to be about--to control or to bring about changes in the behavior of government and people involved in it To me the reforms whether it be the FPPC whether it be the new campaign reform act what it's done is that it's closed the system instead of opening up the system to more people

VASQUEZ In what way?

ALATORRE Well you know all of a sudden as an example ethnic and racial minorities are getting into the system they're learning how to play by the rules and then the rules are changed You know a lot of these reforms basically are incumbents' dreams because they cut down how much people can give and everything else as an example Agencies or institutions that have [large]

numbers of people in it are the ones that are best equipped to change and to roll with the reforms. Those that aren't are the ones that are hurt by it. And because incumbents are better equipped to deal with these major interest groups, it makes it that much more difficult for nonincumbents to function in that arena. And secondly, what it does is it makes people's normal conduct and their interests and involvement in the process. Many times it makes them criminals because they then have to learn how to get around the system.

VASQUEZ: A system that supports them?

ALATORRE: Exactly. Sure.

VASQUEZ: [California] Common Cause argues that it's not the individual but the system that needs fixing. Instead of looking for individual corrupt politicians, really what you're doing is creating a system that forces people, if not to be corrupt, to shave [ethical] corners pretty close.

ALATORRE: The very reforms that are created by passage of either legislation or initiatives force people to shave the corners even more and to find loopholes.

and ways out for them to participate in the process. Yes, I think the reforms short of public financing are going to make more criminals out of people that are participating in the process. And many times through lack of knowledge and the like you are closing the system instead of opening the system up to more people participating in it. And you are restricting the kinds of people that even want to go into the political arena as opposed to the diversity--whatever that may be now. It is going to be less tomorrow because of many of these reforms.

VASQUEZ: Let me ask you a question that seems to fit in here and that has to do with the difference that takes place in California over a number of years between the citizen-legislator and the professional politician-legislator. What is your feeling on that? Which do you think is better for good government in California?

ALATORRE: You know today because of the costs for elections unless a citizen-politician is independently wealthy. And the fact that people the participation is being reduced every

year Over the last ten years you see voter turnout and that has decreased So the day of the citizen-politician I think is really over with Because even those that maybe go in as quote a citizen-politician and are faced with reelection after reelection and the cost to get reelected it forces them to become a professional politician And I'll be very honest with you there's nothing wrong with a professional politician who believes in something who knows what his job is supposed to be--and that is to represent--who has a philosophy hopefully who is one that cares about people and believes that government is a vehicle to provide change There's nothing wrong with that quote professional politician Because politics is not easy I mean the day the issues were so simple that it didn't require a great deal of intellect to understand those days are over with I mean you're talking about being a member on a board of directors whose budget and expenditures at the state level are close to \$50 billion or at the city level that's about \$10 billion You know this is not a

nonprofit corporation that has a couple of hundred thousand dollar budget No Government has become very complex and requires that individual to understand the complexity of government

VASQUEZ Let me ask you another question along the same line and that has to do with what some people have termed inbreeding " That is instead of community activists or community types being elected to the state legislature now you have people who started out as an interns then went on to be a staff members then became an administrative assistant and before you know it they were the incumbent in that very office they had served Is there anything wrong with that?

ALATORRE I don't think there's anything wrong with that At least the person has prepared him or herself so that once that he or she is an elected representative they have an understanding of the responsibilities and the know-how to get things done on behalf of the people that have elected that individual You know what is a community candidate? I don't know what that means I mean you know everybody claims or purports to

speak for quote the "community ' Ultimately
 the community decides who has the right to speak
 for them When they delegate an elected
 individual to office he has been given a mandate
 from the people of that area

VASQUEZ I think the concern is the accountability that
 such a person might become more accountable to
 the people who have the money

ALATORRE But see it's not the people that have the money
 that go to the ballot box and reelect them

VASQUEZ But they do narrow the field as who gets on the
 ballot

ALATORRE Well many times you can look at what has
 escalated the cost of campaigns And if the
 people want their elected representatives to be
 truly their voice then the people should opt for
 legislation that I introduced that I got passed
 when I was a member of the legislature out of the
 assembly and that is public financing You
 know people complain about the influence of
 special interests And yet when they are given
 an option to have their elected representatives
 be accountable to only them they will say
 Well I'm not going to give my money to these

crooked politicians or to any politicians

You know it has been said many times the quality of the representation that exists is better than what people deserve Because see it's people that elect them And see that's a sad commentary but it's a real commentary If people truly believe that government should be representative and the people they elect should only be accountable to them then the only way that they are accountable to them is by having public financing so that no special interest other than the people have the influence [over] that individual

VASQUEZ Did the efforts of the 1974 Proposition 9 reform weaken or dilute at all the impact of special interests in California?

ALATORRE You know the special interests are the bodies that have the ability to hire people to be able to get around these laws And if anything it decreases the influence of people and increases the influence of organized institutions That's what the reforms have done All of these reforms quote are to open up the process I submit that these reforms have closed the process

more and more to the access of people

VASQUEZ In your estimation what is the solution?

ALATORRE Look at what the solution had been up to now
Campaign limitations contribution limitations
you now report how much organized bodies can give
and not give That hasn't resolved anything
The ultimate solution from my vantage point if
we truly believe that special interests have too
much influence the only option I see is public
financing of which I advocate

VASQUEZ How about the notion of limiting how much any
candidate can spend in addition to a public
financing checkoff?

ALATORRE Well I mean that's fine That's an incumbent's
dream because

VASQUEZ Would it stand up to First Amendment challenges?

ALATORRE It's questionable There are I believe some
states that have it But see that's not going
to resolve anything Because that gives an undue
advantage to an incumbent who is already
elected already has name identification is
already doing things and the like It restricts
the ability of a person seeking office because
he has to live by the same rules as an

incumbent So it's a great idea I'll
tell you all of these things sound great But
in reality they all are to the advantage of the
elected officeholder

VASQUEZ How about the limit on a number of terms that a
legislator can serve? That's a proposal that has
been raised ¹

ALATORRE Well then you have it You have a body
that constantly is changing And it takes an
elected representative--a new one--a period of
years to learn the system and to hopefully the
advantage of his constituents So the only
people that I believe lose are the very people
that elect these individuals Because you know
a person that is a good officeholder and is
responsive and the like and people are happy
with that person and the people that are
benefitting by that person are the ones that get
hurt I mean why is it? You know we have
accountability The ultimate accountability is
reelection and elections

¹ In the November 1990 general election two
initiatives 131 and 140 were on the ballot proposing to
limit the number of terms an incumbent may hold office

VASQUEZ But you say yourself that the cost of getting elected is such that it eliminates competition

ALATORRE Well yes But all these reforms eliminate competition because they all are restricting what a new person can and cannot do Ultimately the only thing that I think will work is public financing so that special interests have nothing If we start with the premise that they have undue influence and we take their participation away and the only participation that we allow is quote the general public Then these special interests have nothing to give so consequently allegedly have nothing to get

VASQUEZ One of the ideas that then Speaker of the Assembly Jesse Unruh had in providing expanded staff and resources to the legislator was to get a greater degree of independence from special interests from the Third House Now some people argue that staffs have become too pervasive and too powerful What's your sense of that?

ALATORRE Well staffs become powerful if the individual legislator allows them to be powerful If you

have a legislator that is knowledgeable that understands how the system works that's not going to happen See I think that Jesse Unruh's idea was to professionalize and provide supportive staff for people to help them with the daily work that an officeholder has to deal with in responding to his or her constituency You know I believe that the legislative body in California is probably the best in the entire country And a lot of it is as a result of the professionalizing of the legislative body and providing them supportive services to allow that person to do a better job as an elected representative I think that that's great If these quote professionals have undue influence and undue power it's as a direct result of the elected officeholders allowing them to have that

VASQUEZ There was another proposal¹ that Jesse Unruh--and this was already after he had left the assembly--proposed and some people have called it hair-

Unruh ' 1 Unruh Jesse One-House Legislature Advocated by
National Civic Review 60 No 5 (May 1971) 253-265

brained But yet two days ago in the Los Angeles Times there was an editorial column calling for a unicameral legislature in California ¹ Is that even a viable idea do you think?

ALATORRE It's viable But I think that it

VASQUEZ Do you see people voting themselves out of a job?

ALATORRE Well sure I think that if that's the way you look at it sure You're voting some people out of jobs But also I think it affects the deliberative process that exists today You know because the assembly has a way of doing their business the senate has a way of doing their business And I think that what happens once that legislation has traveled through the process I think that you have given the opportunity to allow for scrutiny of that measure by individuals that have a vested interest or have a concern about that legislation So I think if anything I think that it helps rather than hinders the openness of government as well

¹ Carter Will "More Representation Could Break Legislative Gridlock Los Angeles Times II (July 13 1989)
7

as the deliberation that takes place during the life of a piece of legislation

VASQUEZ Do you see it as something that would be an improvement perhaps?

ALATORRE Well I think that from the standpoint of people yes it's less government And less government is good I don't necessarily believe that I don't hold that philosophy to be true But there's nothing wrong with the concept I mean I don't have any real strong feelings one way or another But I think in the final analysis it's not going to do what it purports to do

VASQUEZ I think it's a pretty common conception both at the national and at the state level that there's a paralysis a stagnation in the legislatures And consequently the initiative process has to be used perhaps inordinately If you agree there is some stagnation what does that do?

ALATORRE Well first of all I think that the initiative process was set up as a counterbalance allowing the people to put forth issues I think the initiative process has been abused Because it puts a measure on the ballot that hasn't gone through the scrutiny and through the debate that

a measure goes through during the legislative process and puts the real power in the hands of vested interests who support something that may not be in the public's interest See I think it was [developed] as a vehicle for people to seek redress I believe that the initiative process has been abused by certain interests to hoodwink people many times by slick advertisement and money to get it passed through an election that many times creates more problems than it really attempts to solve

VASQUEZ Illustrate that for me will you?

ALATORRE I think the Fair Political Practices Act I think is one I think the [California] Coastal [Zone Conservation] Commission is another even though I think the Coastal Commission was a good idea That has so many loopholes and is so impractical The quote bill of rights for victims that passed there are so many things that are unconstitutional about it and many of the pieces of it have been thrown out because of the unconstitutional nature of it But many times issues have a real emotional appeal that totally abridge the basic rights of people But

they're sold on that emotional aspect to it

VASQUEZ One of the criticisms is that emotional appeal of one issue or segments of an issue becomes a vehicle by which multi- rather than single-issue initiatives pass and a whole lot of baggage comes with them

ALATORRE Oh sure I mean you know you can have one thing good and nine other things that are part of it that under any scrutiny would never see the light of day

VASQUEZ And that's really the responsibility and the charge of legislators isn't that to deliberate that?

ALATORRE And you know I think that many of the issues have been deliberated And because of that deliberation many times they haven't passed Yes there have been issues that have been put to the public that have passed that have been good But I would venture to say that of recent there has been more time consumed more things put on the ballot that have received no deliberation that benefit the very special interests that that particular thing is allegedly trying to curtail I mean look at the deceitful

nature of the advertisement the deceitful nature of the selection of ballot titles for many measures You know I don't think the public interest is served I don't believe in abolishing the initiative process I believe that the basic reason for it being put into play I think is good But I think there has been abuses of that initiative process

VASQUEZ But we'll come back to the criticism that is made that the reason that people fall for this or are forced into this is that the legislators will not provide leadership That they waffle on tough issues

ALATORRE I think there are issues where that probably is very true But more often than not people do not even understand the complexities of the things that many times are being advocated and that allegedly make sense

VASQUEZ But isn't that the role of leadership to make that clear?

ALATORRE Yes But here again sometimes you have special interests whose job it is to make sure that things like that never see the light of day

VASQUEZ How do you break the vicious cycle?

ALATORRE You break the vicious cycle by making damn sure that those vested interests that spent all those millions of dollars influencing the process are put on a level playing field with the people that can't pay if you believe that money in itself is a corrupting influence in the process

VASQUEZ But sometimes it's not money Let me give you an example In today's paper you have the frustrated and really I think quite intelligent quite capable legislator Assemblyman Barry Keene voting affirmatively for an amendment that will overthrow the Supreme Court decision on desecration of the flag When he says himself he doesn't believe in it but he knows it's a trap it's a deathtrap for Democrats not to support it One unnamed legislator says "I'm going to go 'yes ' because to vote 'no' would cost me \$300 000 in campaign efforts to fight off some Republican who would come out of the woodwork if I'm the Democrat who is 'willing to desecrate the flag '

ALATORRE That's the price many times that we have to pay for a system of government that has its checks and balances Sure who in their right mind

condones the desecration of the flag? It is the kind of issue that is difficult to educate the masses about because of the pride that people take about the flag. But see, there are more basic issues. I mean, it's a real complicated one. Because you saw the president. Let's pass a constitutional amendment against the desecration of the flag. Everybody [says] 'Yeah, it's a great idea!'

VASQUEZ: Why not? It worked in his campaign for president.

ALATORRE: Well, it's worked in a lot of people's campaigns because they wrapped themselves in the flag with it. But having to pass a constitutional amendment? I think it's ridiculous.

VASQUEZ: Is it? Or is it shrewd politics by a minority party?

ALATORRE: Oh, it's very shrewd. It's very, very shrewd. Because it's an issue that a particular political party knows is motherhood. And it's almost impossible to explain your vote against something like this. So that's an example of issues that may abridge the very tenets and foundation of our system of government. But to placate the masses

that don't understand the ramifications of something like this they go ahead and pass it

VASQUEZ Some would cynically say "And also to hang onto their jobs they placate the masses by passing something like this

ALATORRE Yeah of course

VASQUEZ Why is it no legislator and only a few newspaper columnists have raised the contradiction If the flag is so important and such a meaningful symbol why do we permit the Confederate flag not only on truckdrivers' side panels but on some state houses in the South Here is a flag that represents an insurrection a violent war against the federal government

ALATORRE How do you explain that? How do you explain that inconsistency in a political campaign? People don't understand it

VASQUEZ It's a quagmire you never come out of?

ALATORRE Absolutely You absolutely never come out of it

VASQUEZ Are American people getting the government they deserve because they don't keep up?

ALATORRE Many times the government they have is better than what people deserve And that is a sad commentary

VASQUEZ Let me ask you another question that is much discussed in this area of legislative reform and that is the increasing role of the media especially electronic media in the making and breaking of politicians Tell me what you think about that

ALATORRE I think everybody believes in the freedom of the press But I think the press has gone into areas and have so manipulated the presentation of these things in a way that has absolutely nothing to do with a person's ability to do a good or a bad job And because the American people spend so much time watching that box being manipulated by that box that the only thing for the sake of ratings that has a scintillating effect on people is the garbage that has no relationship many times to a person's effectiveness as a legislator or as a politician And it is a sad commentary that we have gotten to that point where almost without control the media can manipulate fact can manipulate fiction in such a way to make it believable to people and in so doing have a devastating impact on the very institutions that we hold so dear

You know I believe if I would spend my time tearing down the institution I'm a part of I would get out first See I believe in the legislative bodies that I have either been a part of or I am a part of Not to say that those bodies shouldn't be improved or can't be improved I believe they can be improved But just as the media has gotten so much power because of the medium that they control and that American people are so dependent on and that they believe in that it has taken down people and is tearing this country apart

VASQUEZ I think you would agree from what you've said that the level of political discourse in this country has in many cases been reduced to a thirty-second sound bite

ALATORRE That's the way people get elected

VASQUEZ With the old simplistic slogan and catchy phrase

ALATORRE Whoever can best manipulate the media in recent history has controlled and has been elected

VASQUEZ What does that portend for a democracy?

ALATORRE Unless it changes it doesn't speak very well for our democratic institutions

VASQUEZ In recent years there have been historic mergers

and consolidations of entities in the country that control not only what we see but what we read and what we hear. Never have we had I think a greater concentration of power in media of all kinds. What's your thinking on that?

ALATORRE: It's very dangerous. It's . . . You know and I think

VASQUEZ: How do we break that?

ALATORRE: You have to regulate it. And you have to prohibit one controlling the other. Then you can say . . . Well, that conceivably is unconstitutional. I think the mergers that we have seen, consolidation of the influence and power that we have seen, I think is directly attributable to the [President] Reagan administration, who has allowed, with impunity, the large conglomerates and the like and has condoned these types of mergers and consolidations. It's dangerous. It's dangerous.

VASQUEZ: Should there be accountability to the public interest by communications media? And how would you do that?

ALATORRE: I believe that there has to be accountability of say elected representatives. But I think that the media has to also be accountable for their

stories I just think that right now they're almost uncontrollable I mean the day of the respectable and the doctrines of ethics in the media is almost gone because of the competition by sensationalist journalists and ragsheets that have forced even respected journals and newspapers to have to resort to that type of competition and that type of muckracking

You know competition is great but it's also very dangerous Because competing for what? Competing for the almighty dollar Because there still are some journals and newspapers that don't print a lot of the crap that is printed by others because they don't want to give them respectability But the more and more these journals are controlled by the almighty dollar and the like the more we're going see these types of respected newspapers and journals doing the same thing It's the cost of doing business I don't know what the answer is because on the one hand we live and benefit by our democratic principles But on the other we are hurt by these democratic principles like freedom of speech Before there were things

that were sacred They had nothing to do with in the political arena a person doing his or her job It was understood Now there are no boundaries there are no controls over what it is that is printed and is not printed Everything is fair game To me the destruction of a guy like [United States Senator] Gary [W] Hart was a real sad commentary But he really caused it himself But in so doing it opened up the floodgates for there being no boundaries And everything now is fair game And this moralistic attitude of people about their expectations of their public servants are totally inconsistent with the way that people live their own lives

VASQUEZ Are public expectations unreasonable?

ALATORRE Of course I think they're very unreasonable Because most people don't live their lives according to the way that we expect politicians to live their lives You look at the Moral Majority How many of them are falling for the very things that they are criticizing? It's hypocrisy

[End Tape 5 Side B]

California State Archives
State Government Oral History Program

Oral History Interview

with

RICHARD J ALATORRE

Los Angeles City Councilman 1985-
California State Assemblyman 1973-1985

April 29 May 31 June 20 July 10 July 15
July 22 November 9 November 10 1989 July 13 1990
Los Angeles California

By Carlos Vasquez
Oral History Program
University of California Los Angeles

Volume Two

SESSION 6 July 22 1989

[Tape 6 Side A]

255

Jerry Brown took credit for others' work--The biggest flip-flop governor in recent history--Democratic party defeats due to Brown's reputation--In politics perception often becomes reality--Fair reapportionment is in the eyes of the beholder--The 1971 reapportionment as it affected Chicanos--How Alatorre's special election loss affected the redistricting plan agreed upon between the legislature and Governor Ronald W. Reagan--How the court masters reapportionment benefitted Democrats and Chicanos--Reapportionment commissions are an attempt to depoliticize an inherently political act--Why Republicans are most often in support of blue-ribbon reapportionment commissions--Accountability and judicial review--Membership on the Committee on Elections and Reapportionment can be political death or a hand on the rudder of power--Alatorre's appointment as chair of that committee in 1981--His determination that the Westside contingent would be kept out of the legislative reapportionment--How Cesar Chavez invested political capital in Howard Berman's bid for speaker and how Alatorre got assurances from Willie Brown that farmworker interests would not be compromised--Alatorre goes to the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) for redistricting experts and meets Bruce Cain--How Cain's data processing expertise outpaced Berman's operation--Willie Brown's preoccupation with his media image at the expense of attention to reapportionment--Chavez's continued pressure on Art Torres--The

concerns within the Democratic caucus over Willie Brown's appointment of Alatorre to direct assembly reapportionment

[Tape 6 Side B]

282

The Republicans thought Alatorre would be fair to them in the reapportionment--Willie Brown's staff becomes concerned over Alatorre's silence on the progress of reapportionment preparation--Alatorre's meetings with individual legislators about their respective districts--How the attacks on Alatorre from Californios for Fair Representation (CFR) strengthened his credibility in some quarters--How Alatorre was able to use information garnered from his meetings with individual legislators--Alatorre was going to save Willie Brown in spite of himself--A meeting between Brown and Alatorre unnerves the speaker's staff but gets Alatorre carte blanche for directing the reapportionment--Pressure from Republicans to know the parameters of the reapportionment--How Alatorre used meetings with Republican legislators to completely disconcert them--Buying time to complete the reapportionment plans--Brown interferes in the Caltech operation--How Alatorre drew district lines using often farfetched criteria--Cooperation of CFR with the Rose Institute of State and Local Government posed a threat to Democratic party interests--The ineffectiveness of the Richard Morill plan--The role of the Rose Institute's Alan Heslop--The institute's blatant Republican bias--The role of the technician in the reapportionment process--The relationship of Congressman Philip A. Burton and the Berman machine in redistricting matters--How the Democratic reapportionment effort has kept its data-processing capability current--More on the limitations of the Berman-Waxman redistricting operation--Accountability in reapportionment is assured by a system of checks and balances

[Tape 7 Side A]

316

How the 1980 reapportionment assured Democratic preeminence in growth areas--Specific districts where Democrats may have problems in the 1991

reapportionment--The costs of the 1981 reapportionment--Outcome of Republican lawsuits--Republicans felt they should get a better reapportionment on the basis of their 1980 presidential victory and the Reagan revolution --What the Republicans learned from the 1981 reapportionment--Recurrent Republican criticism of Democratic reapportionments--Rules of the reapportionment game--Current anti-incumbent attitudes could affect both Democrats and Republicans--The use of slates in California elections

SESSION 7 November 9 1989

[Tape 8 Side A]

330

Legislative reform must begin with an adequate salary for legislators--Public campaign financing--The shortsightedness of term limitations--Running for governor by attacking the legislature--The FPPC has been a windfall for accountants and lawyers--The FPPC should not be an enforcement body--Former commission members as consultants--Campaign spending limits--Dishonesty and the rules--The California legislature as a training ground for higher office--Diversity of legislature declining--Why Alatorre decided to run for the Los Angeles City Council rather than Congress--Differences between the assembly and the city council--City council members don't keep their word and are too parochial

SESSION 8 November 10 1989

[Tape 9 Side A]

350

Why the lack of rules of the game in the Los Angeles City Council leads to mediocrity--Alatorre's goal in redistricting the city council--A commitment given by a fellow council member cannot be trusted--Why the new politics is less to be trusted than the old boy network --Alatorre's image in Los Angeles politics as a power broker--Ends are more important than means--His philosophy on urban development and slow growth--The Olvera Street development controversy--The kinds of politics needed to benefit the city and the Chicano

community--Political gadflies don't want to see things accomplished because they lose their platform to complain--The Mexican community in Los Angeles needs political leadership--Alatorre learned the rules of the legislative process and how to make them work for his issues--Using power to promote diversity--The Democratic party as a vehicle for the Chicano community--Within the Democratic party Chicanos must be able to back up their threats

[Tape 9 Side B]

377

Chicanos must first make government work for them at the local level--Why the city council has been more satisfying than the assembly--The lessons Alatorre has learned in legislative politics

SESSION 9 July 13 1990

[Tape 10 Side A]

381

Why Alatorre and CFR were not able to work more effectively on the 1981 reapportionment--CFR did not have a statewide perspective or plan--Congressman Burton was committed to bettering Chicano representation from the outset--Democratic reservations about CFR because of the Rose Institute connections--Some actors in CFR were bent on accomplishing nothing--The trust Alatorre got from Willie Brown--Conflicts between CFR and black incumbents--Often CFR spokesmen were not in agreement--CFR's accomplishments and strengths--Their use of litigation--The impact of the CFR sit-ins at Brown's and Alatorre's offices--The notion of collapsing black districts to bolster Chicano strength--The 1981 effort as a foundation for the 1991 reapportionment--The increased power of litigation challenges in the 1991 reapportionment because of recent court actions--Potential areas of conflict with Democrats in 1991--Those likely carry out the upcoming reapportionment may not be trustworthy--The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors' reaction to lawsuits based on Latino disenfranchisement--Arguments for and against expanding the number of members on the board--An ideological bloc's effort to maintain control at any cost--The election of Sarah

Flores to the county board and what that means--
Why a Chicano board member can be better attuned
to Chicano needs than even the best liberal--The
most pressing needs in county government

[Tape 10 Side B]

410

Potential black-Chicano conflicts in county
government--The role of Chicano employee groups
in county government--Differences in political
styles between Alatorre and City of Los Angeles
Councilwoman Gloria Molina--The difference with
merely advocating and getting things
accomplished--Alatorre's notion of leadership
and consensus--The effect of contemporary
disaffection with elected officials--The not in
my backyard syndrome--Recall efforts against
Alatorre--Criticism for problems over which he
has no control--More on the Olvera Street
controversy--The interests of specific merchant
groups and individuals in the controversy--
People mobilized by partial or false
information--Rapprochement with Molina--
Alatorre's optimism for the future of Chicano
politics

[Session 6 July 22 1989]

[Begin Tape 6 Side A]

VASQUEZ Before we leave the issue of Governor Brown respond if you will to the article that I've just shared with you from the California Journal regarding the farmworker legislation ¹

ALATORRE One of the things that Jerry Brown was probably the most capable of is I mean he's the type of guy that could take credit for most things I mean you can't underestimate the importance of the job that he did He basically thought that any bill he came up with was a workable bill After he was picketed after rallies were held up and down the state of California he decided that his [farm labor] bill wasn't the answer You can't underestimate the fact that he brought the parties together and over a weekend hammered out a bill that became

¹ "Among 1974 Failures--no fault farm labor
California Journal (October 1974) 352

acceptable to most [But] in so doing he was able to take the credit for probably the major farm labor bill in the entire country He had an uncanny ability to even be on the opposite side of an issue and [then] take credit for it in the end Proposition 13 you could have sworn after the passage of Prop 13 that he was the author of it He was able to just change gears and effectively use the media and claim victory [as if] it was his idea The farm labor bill probably is the classic example of this uncanny ability to land on his feet [It's] not to say he doesn't deserve credit because he ultimately signed the bill he was the person that was able ultimately to bring the parties together I'll give him credit for doing that and signing a bill that became law and made history

VASQUEZ Is that so unique in politics?

ALATORRE It's not unique but I think he was the most effective at doing it

VASQUEZ What does that do to the credibility of an executive with his legislative colleagues when he does something of a flip-flop [as] you mention?

ALATORRE Oh well he was known as probably as the biggest flip-flop governor in recent history It

irritates legislators and it gets them mad He was able to just jump from one side to the other And most of the time he landed on his feet

VASQUEZ Does it undercut the credibility of the party he belongs to?

ALATORRE See the party at that time wasn't important to him He thought he was the party And for a while he was the best hope for the party until he assumed office and proceeded to do some of the things that he did And he could care less He didn't think very much about the party he didn't think very much about the grass roots nature of it he felt he was the party And I think it hurt the credibility of the party Because he was the titular head of it his ideas were assumed to be the ideas of the Democratic party And as a result of it for a long time the Democratic party was ridiculed People ran against Jerry Brown for a long time and were very effective at doing it

VASQUEZ But that eventually hurt the party?

ALATORRE Of course it hurt the party It caused the defeat of many candidates

VASQUEZ Tell me about some of the people you think [were

defeated because] of Jerry Brown's meandering

ALATORRE Well let's just say of recent I think Lyle Hall's [loss] clearly was a direct result of the endorsement by Jerry Brown If you look at judges that were appointed by him and [subsequent] elections they had I think you'll be shocked to find out how many of them lost their elections because of the mere fact that they were appointed by Jerry Brown And in this field the rise to power of the District Attorneys Association Many [were] appointed in areas where they didn't stand a chance in hell of getting reelected The appointment of Yvonne Brathwaite Burke is a classic example Great lady I think she was an outstanding legislator Should have been a great member of the [Los Angeles County] Board of Supervisors But he appointed her in an area where she didn't have a prayer in hell of getting reelected

VASQUEZ Any legislators you can think of?

ALATORRE No I would really have to really look at them But I'll be very honest with you Most of the attacks and whatever defeats took place during that period of time [it's because] they ran as clones of Jerry Brown And then [California

Supreme Court Chief Justice] Rose [Elizabeth] Bird became a symbol And she also caused the defeat of not just legislators but members of the judiciary It was an asset to be with Jerry Brown at the beginning And then toward say his second term of office [there were] cartoons "Moonbeam" Governor they made fun of his frugality It was all symbolic and meant nothing in the real world But he set the stage for a lot of the cartoons that came out during that period Because he was obviously like no other governor in the history of California

VASQUEZ Perception means everything in politics is that it?

ALATORRE Perception many times becomes reality in politics

VASQUEZ Let's get into reapportionment if you will You were very active in the 1981 reapportionment But tell me first of all what do you understand by fair reapportionment? And then secondly what lessons came out of the '71/'74 reapportionment?

ALATORRE Fair reapportionment is in the eyes of the beholder Fair reapportionment is defined by the party in power The '71 reapportionment basically demonstrated the raw political power of the

Westside [of Los Angeles] by on the one hand

VASQUEZ Be more specific

ALATORRE Well Henry Waxman On the other hand Hispanics were told that nothing could be done to create opportunities for [us] because we were losing that we had lost population and population growth was "in other geographic areas

VASQUEZ That it was spreading out?

ALATORRE Oh yes It was [spreading] into suburban communities into strongholds that Chicanos were never a part of But yet with the vocal nature of Chicanos in the '70 reapportionment the end result was basically a creation of another district in West Los Angeles for a friend of the Waxman--then it was just a Waxman machine It helped to elect not only Howard Berman but [Assemblyman Meldon H] Mel Levine Yet, we were being told during that period of time that there was no way to do anything [for Chicanos] in Los Angeles because of the loss in population It was basically an incumbent's redistricting plan that eventually ended up being thrown out because there could be no agreement And that was as a result of my defeat There was an agreement prior to the special election by the

Republicans that a bill would be signed
Figuring that I was going to win The day after
my election [there] was supposed to be a session
that would have passed the redistricting plan out
of both houses and was going to be signed by the
governor As it ended up I lost the special
election [November 16 1971]

VASQUEZ The vote was that close?

ALATORRE No it wasn't even that What happened is that
there was a compromise that was reached that had
the blessing of the governor He was going to
sign a redistricting plan But because I lost
negotiations opened up again and it was a whole
different ballgame So consequently he could
never get a redistricting plan So it ended
up that the [California Supreme] Court [appointed
three masters in 1973 to settle the reappor-
tionment stalemate in the legislature] And
ironically the courts did a better job than the
legislature did as it related to Chicanos

VASQUEZ Some people credit Governor Reagan's veto of that
plan for putting this into the courts and giving
Chicanos a better shake in that redistricting

ALATORRE Well I mean you have to remember that in areas
where Chicanos lived you had incumbent

Democratic legislators that had to be protected And the fact that there could not be an agreement because of the change in what the Republicans wanted They wanted to protect Bill Brophy Even though they acknowledged that he didn't deserve protecting And it pissed off the Republicans when it was thrown into the courts At least the incumbent Republicans felt very good about the districts that they had But in all fairness to one of their colleagues you know they tried to up the ante By upping the ante it threw everybody into the hands of the courts which ended up being a windfall for Democrats and a tremendous loss for Republicans The justices that came up with plans that just [increased] the numbers of Democrats to the point where you know hell we now started controlling I forget what the final number was but it was close to two-thirds that we had It wasn't destined for long to keep those numbers but then it was good enough Because very soon thereafter we then had a Democratic governor But I think if you asked the Republicans they were just angry just infuriated with the governor It took care of all the incumbents

and they felt that was the best they could get
And yet by him not agreeing to sign [the plan]
it threw it into the courts And the courts not
just did a better job for Hispanics but they
certainly did a better job for Democrats

VASQUEZ Now there was a commission that attempted to
play a role It was a commission of
constitutional officers led by the then
lieutenant governor What is your feeling on
commissions?

ALATORRE Redistricting is a most blatant political act
And commissions are an attempt to depoliticize
something that inherently is political and it is
naive

VASQUEZ No matter who they're [composed] of?

ALATORRE I don't care who they're made up of Everybody
has a philosophy--good bad or indifferent
People don't live in isolated worlds from people
from events from experiences Everybody
basically has a philosophy about quote
representative government and what makes the
most sense Commissions have always been in
California a means of helping Republicans
Either commissions or setting up panels to take
away the responsibility of redistricting from the

legislature I think is a very naive belief And I think it's probably the worst thing that could ever happen to Chicanos

VASQUEZ You say that Republicans have especially been in favor of commissions Is that because they're in a minority-[party] status?

ALATORRE Of course I mean do you think that in preparation for the 1990 redistricting [when] the Republicans lob all these initiatives and try to get them qualified to take away the power from the legislature [that that] is for good government? No They feel that they'll get a better shake and a better deal to make up for their minority status And quite possibly they could take control They feel they can't do any worse by a commission or by taking the redistricting away from the legislative body I assure you if they were in power they wouldn't be advocating commissions They wouldn't be advocating taking away redistricting from the legislature I'm a great believer that the legislative process irrespective of who is in power is a deliberative process And it is much more open--even though the openness question is criticized by many--than a nameless body of

people that isn't accountable to anybody So even if Republicans were in power I'd never agree to the idea of

VASQUEZ Is it naive as some have said Well look such a commission is accountable to the constitution of the state They're on constitutional

ALATORRE But redistricting is more than just being accountable to the constitution of the state There are a lot of factors in redistricting-- factors that have to be weighed in the crafting of any plan

VASQUEZ Tell me what some of those factors are in your mind

ALATORRE Factors are ethnicity one person one vote understanding the political geography of communities

VASQUEZ What does that mean? Are you opposed to breaking up cities counties or other geographic [jurisdictional] areas?

ALATORRE I think you only break them up when you have to

VASQUEZ When do you have to?

ALATORRE When you have to by population I didn't do anything that deliberate when I had to break up certain cities You do it [when] population dictates that All of the nuances of what it

takes to put together a plan It's more than just squares and nicely drawn lines It's politics man

The year before redistricting takes place everybody has an even shot The people make the decision as to whom they want to represent them And that's a representative process Monies were spent in 1980 Shit Republicans knew what the stakes were just as Democrats knew what the stakes were Somebody wins in the political game and somebody loses It just so happened that the Democrats won The people spoke They elected the type of representative they felt could best represent them Whether they knew or they didn't know they made that choice And [those] persons are accountable to those people where a nameless commission isn't accountable to anybody That's number one

Number two I would question the representativeness of any of those bodies when you use retired justices You know the judicial system has been a fairly one-sided group of men and women--mostly men California is made up of a lot of people and if we look at the judiciary and look at how representative it really is from

the standpoint of ethnicity socioeconomics and everything else Of course the judiciary is moving toward being more representative But we're so far away from it really being representative of the people that you would have a body then that would not be representative of the state

VASQUEZ Let me take two of those that you mentioned First of all accountability The other side argues that in fact districts can be gerrymandered in such a way that there is really no accountability that there is such a tight control on that district by a party that it can pretty much call its own shots

ALATORRE If it meets the muster of judicial review and if you adhere to the precedents that have been set down of one person one vote maintaining the integrities to the extent possible of cities and counties and geographic boundaries

VASQUEZ Compactness is another concern

ALATORRE Compactness--that's never been defined The question of not doing anything to disturb the political aspirations of ethnic and racial minorities until there are different standards that are litigated The [1981]

redistricting plan that I drafted met all those standards and was reviewed by every court in the land. If I violated those standards then I think that you could use that argument.

VASQUEZ: Let's get into the 1981 reapportionment and then we'll talk about some of these general concepts in light of your own experience.

ALATORRE: Um-hmm [affirmative]

VASQUEZ: How were you assigned or appointed to the Elections and Reapportionment Committee?

ALATORRE: Well, obviously [by] the speaker.

VASQUEZ: You made an earlier statement that it was not one of the most exciting appointments to have--not speaking about this particular one--drawing maps and whatever.

ALATORRE: Well, [assignment] to the Committee on Elections and Reapportionment is kind of like a punishment. It's kind of like the last committee that you dole out after you've taken care of all of your friends. But in the case of my appointment in 1981, it was the most important committee from the standpoint of the speaker in power.

VASQUEZ: Willie Brown?

ALATORRE: Yes, Willie Brown. If you would have asked me

"Was that the committee that you wanted?" when I helped Willie get elected to be speaker I would have said no But looking at it from Willie's standpoint Willie needed somebody he could trust--implicitly Because the fate of his leadership--number one and uppermost in Willie's mind--was in the hands of whoever did that job He threw out the idea to me when we were talking and he asked me to support him for speaker He said he had been thinking about if he made it who could he trust? He said You know I think it would be great for you because the issue is going to be very important to ethnic and racial minorities " I didn't even pay attention I said "Yes we'll talk about it I mean I had ideas of other committees

VASQUEZ What other committees did you have in mind?

ALATORRE Oh I was interested in possibly [Committee on] Health I was interested in possibly [Committee on] Ways and Means Probably Ways and Means more so than any Maybe the Rules Committee

VASQUEZ After your long drought

ALATORRE Well yes I had been out I hadn't sat on good committees for a long time But I helped him put it together for speaker and he got elected And

in his mind he was going to appoint me to Elections and Reapportionment My friends said you know that's important not only could it really make a statement on his speakership but also here was a chance to help out the Chicano community " When it became obvious that's where I was going then I said fine I'll be very honest with you I was scared shitless of that committee because I knew nothing about the mechanics of redistricting

VASQUEZ Did you look for specialists?

ALATORRE There was this basic fear that the speaker had about the "Westside contingent My natural concern about them [was that] one thing for sure they weren't going to be involved in the process as far as the legislature Yet recognizing that there were people who felt that they were the only ones that could do it because they were the only ones who had the expertise

VASQUEZ Like who?

ALATORRE Oh you know Howard Berman

VASQUEZ And Michael Berman?

ALATORRE I'm talking about Michael Berman and the other one is Carl D'Agostino Even though we had won there still was that mistrust by the other side

about Willie Brown Remembering that Willie took a lot of criticism because he put that coalition together that he was a traitor that he had sold out to the Republicans and deals had been cut on redistricting

VASQUEZ But that's the way speakers have traditionally been chosen in California by a bipartisan vote

ALATORRE Yes when you have forty-one votes from your own party I mean what the hell does it matter what Republicans you get on your side? But in this case the speaker was brought into power not necessarily by a majority of Democrats But it was really a majority with Republicans So a lot of questions were raised that deals had been cut And I'm going to tell you right now they were stupid in not cutting a deal Because if I would have delivered as many Republicans as they did

VASQUEZ [Assemblywoman] Carol Hallett did

ALATORRE Carol Hallett I would have cut some deal

VASQUEZ What about the lieutenant governor Mike Curb in a closed caucus assuring [Republicans] that the farmworkers would get no special treatment under [Willie] Brown and that it was worth the deal? It sounds a little thin to me

ALATORRE That's bullshit Willie has been known to say things and people interpret in what he is saying whatever they want to hear Now, you also have to remember that César was out there saying that there had to have been a deal Because see he had invested his reputation he

VASQUEZ He had political capital at stake

ALATORRE He had political capital And there really was no reason why the rift between him and César that was created by the election of Willie Brown should have ever existed If you look at their history Willie was in Bakersfield man at one of the first MAPA conventions supporting César along with George Moscone Phil Burton John Burton and the like So their history goes back a long ways But a lot of bad blood was created because in the mind of César the farmworkers had been fucked by Carol Hallett and the Republicans, and it was at their expense--which was untrue

VASQUEZ Over time did that prove to be true? Over time did Willie Brown prove to be a supporter of the farmworkers?

ALATORRE Yes Of course I engineered the whole thing Because I told Willie "I'm telling you right now man I can't afford for you to turn around

and screw the farmworkers because you are trying to appease not only the Democrats but also these fools, Republicans " And he said You don't have to worry about it man ' He said The [Labor] Committee will be so composed Because I also made it very clear that the Labor Committee I had to have control of that committee I couldn't afford for that committee in any way to reinforce what Cesar believed was the case We took care of that I mean it was fine He proved that to be so

What I did is that I had a meeting with Wally Karabian I had worked with Dan Kevles from Caltech [California Institute of Technology] And my number one candidate was Dan Kevles who I wanted to do the redistricting Because he's a political scientist brilliant computer mind and everything I had a meeting at the Hilton Hotel I had breakfast with Wally and Dan Kevles And he brought a young guy with him one of his colleagues by the name of Dr Bruce Cain And basically Kevles at that meeting said Hey man I can't afford to take the time off I have this deal with the Atlantic Monthly for X number of articles I'm the chairman of my

department I'll put some time into it But I can't put in the time that would be required but I want to introduce you to this young man that's a colleague of mine by the name of Bruce Cain So Bruce Cain gave a little bit of his background Rhodes Scholar Harvard [University] graduate and everything else Smart mother-fucker! Smart! And Kevles said You can be assured that I'll oversee it and it will be just fine I was really very apprehensive man Because he [Cain] didn't have any experience in anything ¹ But the one thing that always stood out in my mind because I started explaining what I viewed the whole thing to be The guy didn't even blink an eye and he said "That's easy I said to myself "Well that's easy for him to say you know smart Caltech Ph D Rhodes Scholar He said I'll tell you what I know nothing about politics nor am I interested about political deals or anything else I'll leave that to you and you don't worry about me being able to come up with a plan He started

1 For Cain's version of this reapportionment see Cain Bruce The Reapportionment Puzzle Berkeley University of California Press 1984 especially The Hispanic Lobby

describing a little background work for the meeting and everything else And he said A plan is the easiest thing " You know massaging You just tell me what you want massaged and I have got whiz kids out there I've got fucking freshmen that can make circles around Berman and D'Agostino I'm not impressed with the stuff they have And I thought the guy was kind of ballsy I mean here were these guys that even in my eyes were experts But I'd never trust them Because you couldn't trust them You didn't know what agenda they were operating on So I said "Fine I'll hire you But as long as you're going to be around Kevles it's fine " He said Oh yeah Don't worry I'll oversee the project " So I hired him

Now you can imagine Willie Brown when I told him I had hired these [people] 'Well what's his background?" Shit he had me back running down every district And I know down deep in Willie's mind he was saying Oh God' Please you've gotta put this together You can't embarrass me man But because he entrusted me implicitly he was more worried about other things That was like down the line But always

in the back of the mind He had the same
reputation I did we were not good at detail We
were good whenever we had to razzle and dazzle
people detail was not our strong suit He never
told other people he felt the way he did I
mean it was just something he kept very private

So I started hiring people he started
hiring people Man I must have employed half of
Caltech during the redistricting project I had
like 300 or 400 people working for me all
students--part-time workers computer geniuses and
everything else And you know Bruce began to
put together all of the political data that we
needed using the old tapes extrapolating the old
tapes And he came back to me and he said You
know most of the things have been taken
Everybody dealt at the census-tract level I
have got this kid that came up with a little
computer plan that will take it down to the block
level --which had never been done Because you
dealt with big numbers and prayed The only
place you had to be very careful was in Los
Angeles And usually Michael [Berman] knew how
to break down the thing because he had lived
here he knew all the data But see everything

they did they did by hand They were not
computerized That's where we killed them

VASQUEZ You're talking about the Bermans?

ALATORRE The Bermans yes Everything was done by hand
And it really was the genius of Phil Burton
because he knew this state inside and out I
mean he knew where everybody lived that was his
thing Burton the day after redistricting ended
in 1970--well whenever it ended '71--he began
to file for 1980 redistricting He opened up the
file and he started doing shit So
redistricting for him was a ten-year process

VASQUEZ Now were you working off the '80 census? This
was not

ALATORRE This was the '70 census '70 then until we got
the big tape

VASQUEZ But the tapes were late for a number of reasons
in 1980

ALATORRE Yes right

VASQUEZ So by the time you had Bruce Cain what were you
working off '80 or '70?

ALATORRE Oh we were dealing with the '70 census The
tapes hadn't even come out But you know
developing the program so that you could just
feed the tape was the most important And that's

what they started doing The stuff they came up with dazzled everybody Even dazzled Michael Berman I mean that's how smart Bruce Cain and all these kids that he had were--and they were all kids They were no veterans they were all students of his He knew where all the talent was on the campus for whatever he needed He said "Oh shit I've got students that are smarter than Michael Berman I says "Oh come on man I didn't even believe the stuff

So we started assembling the stuff See Willie was so busy doing other things man that he didn't have time to focus [on this] He was just praying that I was doing something There was still dissension in the caucus and you know people were wondering and everything else And I'll be very honest with you In Willie's mind he started falling in love with his press Because he did he became a member-speaker You know he believed the way you stay in power man you help out your members And he started being a friend of the growers They called him the "urban cowboy ' because he loved to ride horses Because he had a lot of rural Democrats on his side he was like a showpiece in the rural

areas And of course with all that César was just having a heart attack "I told you so And I would constantly have to tell him Now Willie you motherfucker you'd better tell me man Because you're fucking me Forget about Art Torres you know you're doing it to me And let me tell you something I ain't going to take it Art's pissed off but I'm not See to me what César did was business The reason he didn't do it to me was because he knew that it would probably piss me off and I would do the opposite of what he wanted instead of being pressured Where with Art he knew where the points of pressure were And if I hadn't been there Art would have gone the other way easily You have to be very careful how you use this Art is not good when you put him on the street Put him in an alley man he'd have a hard time getting out of the alley César knew that man He knew how to do it I mean he knew Art had a lot of guilt because it was kind of like his father and Cesar was pissed off at his son how could the son do this With me as he described me one time to my mother "You know a greater ally a greater friend I could never

have He has the biggest pair of taranjas [balls] I have ever seen on any politician He said 'And, you know I love him for that I know Willie so well that to spite César--because César was being so ugly with him--he said I'll teach that "

VASQUEZ What kinds of things would César do?

ALATORRE Oh he had press conferences calling him a sell-out and trying to get him censured saying that he had sold out the farmworkers to the agricultural interests that there had to have been a deal

VASQUEZ A lot of emotional stuff?

ALATORRE Oh a lot of emotional stuff Because see César was hurt man I mean he had put in a lot of money

VASQUEZ How was he hurt? Tactically?

ALATORRE He was hurt because I mean he felt that he was going to own his own speaker He put in a lot of money into the campaign And Willie became speaker without putting in a dime I set up an operation in Pasadena--which was unheard of And I set up a little satellite office in Sacramento which was never used until the very end And legislators started to get nervous Well you

can imagine if you're a white boy and you've got a black speaker and as one of his first acts he appoints a Mexican--and the only issue on redistricting is about Mexicans--you got to worry And all of them knew of my relationship with Willie So there were digs being taken at me you know, "He's a fuck-up How can you trust him? He won't tell us anything " Because I'll tell you something They didn't get anything out of me Willie didn't get anything out of me They'd ask how it was coming along Because I remember one thing man you never say anything to the press about what you're doing The buzzwords I learned to deal with the press were fair and equitable and constitutional I learned all the buzzwords It didn't matter what question they asked me I'd answer the same way Yes we're going to come up with a fair and equitable plan for redistricting and we're going to take into consideration ' That's all of it Just I said nothing That would bug them And then the opposition was out there trying to poison the waters started going to Democrats You know there must have been a deal

VASQUEZ The opposition was within the Democratic caucus

or the Republican?

ALATORRE Oh within the Democratic caucus Oh absolutely And then Republicans kind of said Yeah we really got a deal ' See I'll tell you how stupid they were how naive Carol Hallett was just kind of like A polyester princess is what I called her And as smart as she is and as smart as Republicans claim to be they got nothing outside of how he [Brown] was going to treat them And Carol Hallett got caught up with I'm going to let you appoint your members of the committees Of course I'll tell you how many you're going to get Se prendió [she got caught up with that] But the most basic and fundamental issue--which was redistricting I think she really thought that Willie was going to be fair

[End Tape 6 Side A]

[Begin Tape 6 Side B]

ALATORRE I'm sure in the eyes of the Carol Halletts of the world they probably really thought that Willie was going to be fair And probably in his mind he was going to be fair But I never made a commitment to them that I was going to be fair I never made it to them and I never made it to

Willie Because see, my job was very simple
See he got caught up in all the publicity that
these people really loved him Okay? Well I
knew that that was all bullshit that if they
could they'd kill him! But they tolerated him
He was kind of like a new doll in town you know
kind of like the Barbie dolls Well he was new
he was a black Barbie doll

VASQUEZ And he was colorful?

ALATORRE Yes very colorful And they just thought he was
entertaining But Willie got caught up with
that But see he never bothered me I'll tell
you this is the honest-to-God truth His staff
one day came to me and really started getting
nervous Because he was getting so much heat
from the Republicans the Democrats about "Where
are our maps?" and What is happening? And it
was true Willie would just tell them Now if I
don't know what's happening and he doesn't tell
me how do you expect to know me what's
happening? He's crazy I mean, I ask him and
he just does his shuffle and he walks away What
are you going to do?" But see it was true But
he never really asked because he was afraid to
But one day they came

VASQUEZ When did they come to you about what month?

ALATORRE Oh man they came to me throughout the process
See you have to understand that as soon as we
started to [get] some fundamental knowledge
[about] everybody's district according to the
1970 census I had meetings with eighty members
of the legislature I'd have a picture of their
district I'd have some basic demographics of
their district I knew as much about their
district as they did so I'd ask them about their
district And we took meticulous notes

VASQUEZ What kind of things would you ask?

ALATORRE They'd come in I'd have a picture of their
district I knew enough about it so I just asked
them "Why don't you tell me about your
district? Tell me what you perceive to be your
strengths your weaknesses What it is you
absolutely have to have? What it is that you
feel that you have to lose? What areas are
important to you in terms of your political-
economic base? I'd ask them anything whatever
would come to my mind

VASQUEZ Did you ask them about what future plans they
had?

ALATORRE Oh yes

VASQUEZ If they wanted to go to Congress?

ALATORRE Oh yes

VASQUEZ What was the purpose of this? Was it a genuine purpose to get information or was it ?

ALATORRE You see one thing about politicians is they love to talk. You ask them a few questions they love they just spill their guts out. I'm out there saying Yeah that's interesting. See they knew I was up to something. But I never gave them any reason other than their own paranoia to feel uncomfortable. By this time Mexicans [Californios for Fair Representation] were attacking everybody attacking me. These Mexicans didn't know what was happening but they just figured that I was going to sell out because

VASQUEZ In a way did the attacks from some segments of the Chicano community help you?

ALATORRE Oh I told them. I told them ahead of time. I said Knock yourself out man. But don't piss me off neither. I said 'Do it. But this time man start taking care of some business. Don't show up when I start having hearings and just come out with baboseadas [babbling] you know?"
The Rose Institute of State and Local Government

was emerging and they were being coopted and all this Richard Santillán all of a sudden was a great reformer of the world And he was being used left and right But he didn't quite know what he was being used for It was slick

VASQUEZ Let's finish this part

ALATORRE Yes [I was] going through all of this just sucking stuff [information] out of them man They [legislators] didn't realize that everything they told me could also be used against them when I drafted a plan And I mean I stuck it to them [pounds fist] I mean because of the stuff they told me

VASQUEZ Give me an example

ALATORRE Well one of them said I don't give a damn about this whole process I think it's corrupt I can win in any district in and around the area "

And I kept on asking the question I said "Well wait a minute man But at least I'd like to know something about how you perceive

I wasn't elected to do this I don't want anything to do with it I think it's a bunch of bullshit I don't have the time I'm worried about the people's problems '

I said "Okay thank you '

VASQUEZ Who was this?

ALATORRE John Vasconcellos

VASQUEZ But he was somebody who might stand to lose

ALATORRE Well yes But he was stupid According to him
 "I think it's important " or The aspirations of
 Chicanos " he gave all the rhetoric Yes
 good Oh thank you very much " I said Are
 there any areas you ?" "No this isn't
 important to me man This is raw political
 bullshit " So he walked away 'Okay thanks '

 Then there were other people that would
 say things about I mean I ultimately used
 one against one guy when he said I don't want
 any niggers I don't want any Mexicans I don't
 want any young people I don't want any of
 this I just want people that look like me and
 are old like me " 'Is that so? Okay thank you
 very much

VASQUEZ [laughter] Who was that?

ALATORRE [Assemblyman] Leroy [F] Greene So I said
 "Oh fine ' So I figured shit I'll tell you
 how I'm going to deal with this guy It's the
 whole concept of you circle him You know the
 wagon traced circles around him and shit he's
 out there by himself And that's exactly what I

did And so he wanted to play that one? So fine I was going to go around him and give anything away that he wanted If somebody else wanted it as long as they gave me a vote simple So I went through the whole thing I did all eighty [districts] of them

By this time all paranoia was breaking out And one day the staff came to me and said-- her name was Judy Briggs-- 'You know Richard -- and you know her and I became very very good friends She was a political operative for Willie out of the Bay Area She just said 'You know man He's not saying it or anything else but you know the man [Brown] isn't focusing on redistricting I think in his mind he's willing to give the Republicans what they want Because he said 'Well you know they're the ones that helped me ' And you know all these other Democrats are out there backstabbing me and everything else He said 'I'll get forty-one votes for a redistricting plan ' I mean it is scary You know the only one he'll listen to is you '

VASQUEZ What did that do to you? Did that worry you?

ALATORRE No I didn't give a damn Because hell I was

going to get forty-one votes without him
Because I was going to save him in spite of
himself I knew he was caught up So I made an
appointment to see him I went to see him And
I started by lying down on the couch starting to
talk to him And his staff was there and they
were all reverent, "Mr Speaker " and
everything else I think at one point I climbed
on top of the desk and he was sitting down on
his chair and called him every [name] in the
world I said "You know man you're falling in
love with this fucking urban cowboy You know
what these motherfuckers think of you? You're
nothing but an urban nigger and you had better
understand it I said Because man they're
out to fucking destroy you you dumbshit I'm
out here trying to help you and you're caught up
in trying to " I swear to God man for
almost two hours He was only interrupted once
by a telephone call And he sat there I mean
people wanted to leave the room Because
nigger " I mean they had never heard that
And see, that's the way Willie and I talk And
we have talked that way for years man I mean
he makes fun of me as a Mexican I make fun of

him as a nigger And this has to be [explained] because it might not be understood but this is how Willie and I communicate It is not out of disrespect for him being black The things he says about me as a Mexican are not out of disrespect about me being a Mexican Well we talk with each other And people whenever we do it they like to leave the room because they think that Willie's going to start or that I'm going to start fighting with him [whispers]

Oh' He called him a dirty Mexican or a spic " Jesus I mean this is what they say

Oh my God there's going to be a war I'm not kidding you man His staff had never heard anybody talk to Willie using the profanities that I used But see this is the way he and I communicate it's the way I get my message across I got on top of his desk yelled at him called him a dumb nigger everything He was interrupted once he said Hold your thought went outside picked his nose came back and said 'Well continue " I walked out of that room I mean I had a great catharsis You know I was going great it didn't matter what he said And that day convinced him that it was

about politics and it was about Democrats and it was about screwing the Republicans So about twenty minutes later Judy Briggs ran up to my office (I was there) and that's when she called me Mr B B "--big balls She says "You did it'" Says "The man listened to you And he understands And basically just go ahead and do whatever you're doing " I said I was going to do it anyway I don't give a damn Because I was going to save him in spite of himself "

And from that point on he was my greatest ally He was afraid he didn't know if I could even come up with a plan Because he certainly couldn't But one thing about Willie is he's a quick study He can walk in and make it so that you know he starts bullshitting He does the razzle-dazzle he picks up a few phrases and he's very intimidating to most I'll give you another story After I did that I mean then we had a whole game plan

VASQUEZ You had carte blanche?

ALATORRE Yes Oh I had carte blanche Well from my vantage point I had carte blanche anyway But still in the back of my mind was the mother-fucker going to double-cross me? Because I told

him ahead of time I told him from the very beginning 'Now man if you cut a deal mother-fucker you tell me " I said You know if you got to do some things I'm willing to help you man ' No I didn't make any!" "Then fine I have carte blanche So don't tell me later 'Hey I promised ' You tell me what are your absolutes He only made one absolute he said I have got to take care of the blacks and you got to make me look good among the Mexicans period ' You know I'm an ethnic and racial minority I appointed an ethnic and racial minority and I can be criticized by that ethnic and racial minority That's all I ask I said 'Hey fine I was going to do that anyway

So then [there was] the standard theme The Democrats would come to him He's crazy man He'd say He's not telling me Now how the fuck do you think you're going to know if he's not telling me? He said He's a loose cannon That would scare them even more He says "Because you know I tried to talk to him man And you know he gives me his da-da shuck-and-jive and he walks away from me So then the Republicans

VASQUEZ What would he tell the Republicans?

ALATORRE Then one day he and I went out for lunch And
he said Man I have got to tell these fucking
Republicans something They're threatening
mutiny and everything else I said Tell them
the same thing that I'm fucking crazy man
They'll believe you anyway They walk out of my
office and they think something's happening but
they don't know what's happening " So he said
you know They've set up a negotiating team
Now you have got to meet with them ' I said
What am I going to waste my time with them
for? What am I going to tell them? He said
'Man just do it for me Fuck you I ain't
going to do it for you man I got better things
to do ' He says No man Come on you gotta
do it " So I was the most disrespectful
I mean I knew they hated me to begin with
Well they didn't know why they hated me but
they figured it out after dealing with me So we
started having these meetings You know it was
like once a week

VASQUEZ With members of Brown's Republican supporters?

ALATORRE Yes

VASQUEZ Who headed the committee?

ALATORRE It was Carol Hallett [Assemblyman] Ross Johnson and I forget who else came in on that It was probably Carol Hallett Ross Johnson And [T Anthony] Tony Quinn would come in you know, Mr Stutter " I figured after I got through with Tony Quinn man the man stuttered more than he did when he started this job [laughter] Because I mean I was outrageous with the poor guy

VASQUEZ He's pretty kind to you in his assessment of that reapportionment ¹

ALATORRE Oh yes Because he respects me He knows what I did He knew what job I had to do And he has to respect me because I was able to do it I mean he hated it

So I remember the first negotiating session They came in and I'm not kidding you I was lying down on the couch man There was not enough room for them to sit down I didn't move They were just standing there [makes throat-clearing noises] I was lying down on the couch and with my eyes closed and then Willie

¹ Quinn T Anthony Carving up California A History of Redistricting 1951-1984 Claremont Rose Institute of State and Local Government 1988

walked in and they were standing He said
 "Hey Richard Could you make a little room?"
 And I didn't say anything I was just lying down
 there He was forced to get some chairs so they
 could sit down So, the first meeting in my
 eyes I mean, we ended up developing this
 strategy for every one of the meetings First
 meeting it went on and they started complaining
 and everything else and after about fifteen
 minutes I said I don't know about you but I
 don't have any time for this fucking bullshit
 And I walked out of the room Willie was
 somewhat insulted What do you mean?" and I
 walked out He said Wait a minute man' We're
 not through with the meeting ' I don't know
 about you but I am Fuck it' And I left And
 he got pissed off and then they started feeling
 sorry for him So they couldn't get pissed off
 at him because he said "Well this guy doesn't
 even have respect for his own boss He was
 smart enough to figure it out This is not bad '

VASQUEZ [Laughter]

ALATORRE We went out for lunch one time and I said, I
 don't want to have these fucking meetings,
 Willie " He said, "I'll tell you what man We

have got to have them we've got to humor them
Now when you get tired, or if I get tired I'll
give you the sign, and you go do what you got to
do and walk out " At every one of the meetings
man I'd walk out One of the times they got so
pissed off at me because I was so disrespectful
that Ross Johnson's false teeth fell out He was
so livid man I mean he was just spitting
blood I know that during this process I got him
to drink so much I mean the guy was always
blitzed man I was totally unreasonable Just
fucking totally unreasonable I'd call them
"You dumb fucking bitch" And I mean you know
just disrespectful to everybody

VASQUEZ And the purpose?

ALATORRE The purpose was to make sure that nothing was
ever accomplished And they'd always blame it on
me they couldn't blame it on Willie He'd say
'Fuck' What am I going to do? He's gone
crazy' So they believed him I mean they
started feeling sorry for him

VASQUEZ And you bought time

ALATORRE Oh I always bought time There was always
time And see to the day that I unveiled the
plan they didn't know what to expect And

Willie didn't know what to expect

One time I was in Mendocino Because I had been working long hours I took about three days off I'd invited him [Brown] to go down to Pasadena and he never had time So one day he decided to go to Pasadena I'm not there He walks in totally dizzy--you know he's an asshole I mean he just shit all over my staff made them feel like fools and everything else So they called me Willie Brown's here I said What is he doing there? So he gets on the line and he started giving me his mumbo-jumbo They probably gave him a briefing paper on redistricting and he started giving me all this rhetoric And I said 'Willie you can't even count man So why are you telling me all this bullshit? I said "You know lay off of the people man These people work long hours some of them work twenty-four hours a day for your ass, man And I mean you're making them feel like fools " And he made them feel like total dogshit He made them feel like rags and was disrespectful and questioned their assumptions like he knew what he was talking about--and he didn't! And I told Bruce Cain I

said 'First of all the guy doesn't know what he's talking about That's just to begin with Now if you guys get intimidated man then maybe I have the wrong people And I hung up So he called me back Willie called me back and said "I want you to come back " I said "Willie I'm on vacation, man I haven't had a fucking vacation I've been working my ass off and you want me to come back for you?" And it ended up yes I mean he really started getting nervous Because you know computer people can't communicate They started you know stuttering and everything else and he said to himself Oh Jesus man' These guys don't know what they're doing " So I had to go and clean up And I told Willie "Just stay away from me man Just let me do my job man ' I said 'I assure you man I'll take care of it " So then he started wondering Well Jesus Christ'" And at one point, he even started toying with the idea that maybe we had to bring in Waxman and Berman Well we were so good we had such good shit I don't remember how Burton figured it out that we knew what we were doing

VASQUEZ Phil?

ALATORRE Phil Because they [Bermans] were doing their stuff by hand We had a computer program that they didn't believe that we could break it down to blocks--and break down the blocks! And somehow he told Willie And you know he had nothing but respect for Phil because he knew what he was doing And so Willie laid off But then he started requesting more information And you know if I wasn't giving anybody information I wasn't even going to give it to him Well I'll tell you the day that we unveiled the plan everybody was suspect Democrats were suspect Republicans even more And when he heard the outcry by the Republicans Willie said Shit there must be something good about this plan ' And the Democrats said Man there must be something good about it ' too They wouldn't be complaining because they never expected what they got I mean we came out we unified the condor reserves as a justification for putting together the plan that the only way that [Assemblywoman] Cathie Wright could ever get to [all of her district] she'd have to take four or five planes Because I mean she couldn't get to it by land She had to get to it by air Oh

no I mean we did it all I mean we had it
filthy

VASQUEZ Here's an article that appeared in the L A
Times Cathie writes about her response to the
map of the district you drew for her Do you
want to respond?¹

ALATORRE [Laughter] Oh yeah that's right

[Interruption]

That was one of my better lines

VASQUEZ Which was what?

ALATORRE Basically that the bird people wanted the condor
reserves unified and that's what we did That
was my justification for the district Oh I
had a lot of others But that one was one of
the better ones yes I mean there were
others One old guy whose name will go unnamed
when I basically showed him his district he had
an orgasm And I said 'Yeah but then some
others aren't going to like it " The guy turned
around to me and said When it comes to nut-
cutting every man for himself That was his

1 Wright is quoted as having told Alatorre I told
him to fold it (reapportionment plan) five ways and put it
where the sun doesn't shine " Luthor Claudia Legislative
Re-Mapping Takes Some Strange Turns Los Angeles Times
(August 27 1981) II 7

description and it was fine with his district

VASQUEZ [Laughter] And this was a Democrat?

ALATORRE No this is a Republican Democrats some of them just looked at the maps and walked out One of them threw down the maps and said this was a bunch of bullshit And I read him back what he said--and that was John Vasconcellos And then he knew that I was serious And he said "Aaugh" Then he ran to the speaker There were about five or six people who ran to the speaker and told him that I was How could I do that to him and he'd been with him And Willie would come back to me and I'd say "Hey let me tell you about your friend Leroy Greene ' I said This is what he said and I will quote him He said 'I don't want any niggers I don't want any Mexicans I don't want any young people All I want is old people like me ' Now Willie you tell me what I'm supposed to do Yeah that's a problem isn't it?' Says Well get me the votes ' So I did exactly that So all I did was just circle them And he voted against it You know I made it a little bit better--because I raped them man I mean I raped them but good

VASQUEZ Vasconcellos?

ALATORRE No I raped Leroy Greene Vasco you know, the things he wanted This great liberal that doesn't like to enter into the political fray He decided to tell me exactly what it was it was just like everybody else "Well gee But his justification where good government You know this area here I've been very active with the medical institutions and teaching facilities and you know these people want me And you know I feel I owe it to them because I've started this project and I've needed to carry it to the end He wanted to split up Chicanos left and right And I told him I said 'I'm not doing it John Go and run to the speaker I will not jeopardize a plan for you that splits up Mexicans Look it this is the testimony I mean they're prepared to take us to court And I mean you go tell the speaker that you want to do X Y and Z and the reason you want to do it-- for your own political interest at the expense of a class?' Oh you know, we had that whole class of Mexicans down boy I mean anybody that wanted to do it Gee I can't do it I mean I have got to unify Chicanos and da-da-da ' It was

great times man I had a great time

VASQUEZ Let's talk a little bit about the Rose Institute of State and Local Government Why did you have Chicano political scientists going to the Rose Institute of State and Local Government instead of going to work for you?

ALATORRE Well it's easy I mean you know political scientists See what it was is that they had a disdain they didn't trust the Democratic party--and I don't blame them

VASQUEZ We're talking about Richard Santillán and Armando Navarro ?

ALATORRE Yes Richard Santillán and all the groups Yes and you know you look at it this way I wouldn't pay attention to Armando Navarro or Richard Santillán They're nice guys and everything else but you know they were hit men And they didn't even know it They thought they were doing it for the sake of mankind And I told Richard one time I said Look it man I don't expect you to attack the man that feeds you But I don't want you to be a whore either Just don't turn around and try and screw me And see the Rose Institute of State and Local Government played a great role Because

they became the friend of the Chicano The Chicano community was all Democrats Democrats had screwed them and here they were going to give them all this free computer time and simulations and everything else for free'

VASQUEZ People were unsatisfied with the '71 reapportionment

ALATORRE I don't blame them

VASQUEZ These people had come out of La Raza Unida party And so they felt they could be a third force? Is that what it was?

ALATORRE Yes that they could be a third force But see for the Rose Institute of State and Local Government clearly they had blatant political interests in the Republican party But they could use the Chicanos and develop great districts No reality to them but they were great for Chicanos And I told Chicanos from the very beginning I said Understand that my job is to get votes to sell a plan Now don't give me things that there's no way I can sell I said And don't fall in love with the Rose Institute of State and Local Government because they'll give you a plan that of course is going to blatantly screw Democrats and yes they're

going to help Chicanos But isn't it interesting? They're also going to take care of the Republicans in the process And since when are they supposed to be your best friends? You know these great saviors of the community?" To help out Chicanos the Republican party and hurt the Democratic party Slick But I made it very clear to them I said Hey if you go to bed with them you're my enemy I didn't tell them in so many words but Willie Brown made it very clear to them when he spoke to the conference on redistricting

VASQUEZ The recent one at the Rose Institute of State and Local Government?

ALATORRE Yes at the Rose Institute of State and Local Government Sure You know and they were hired by the Republican party to do redistricting Now if I'm a Democrat and the Chicanos go to bed with the very group that's interested in my demise under the guise of trying to help out Chicanos then what credibility am I going to have? What ammunition do I have then to sell my party that "Hey these guys are good when they're in bed with the enemy? And I told them I said 'Use them but don't be used '

VASQUEZ Which do you think happened?

ALATORRE I think initially they were used very effectively

VASQUEZ At the time the Rose Institute was under attack One particularly damaging article in the California Journal made all the links of [Alan] Heslop's previous employment with the Republican party

ALATORRE Yes he was a hit man

VASQUEZ Okay Did the [Richard L] Morrill plan at all make any difference slow your processes down at all?

ALATORRE No none of that stuff I didn't pay attention to any of that

VASQUEZ You didn't?

ALATORRE No why should I? None of it was reality I needed forty-one votes and I didn't want to pay attention I think at the end because we surprised the Chicanos it took the [wind] right out of the Rose Institute of State and Local Government Yes Because see they were prepared I mean most of the things we knew we were going to get screwed and that's the way it started And they would try and be Some would be very complimentary toward me others

would be very derogatory toward me You know that was part of the game And on the one hand I didn't like it personalized but then on the other hand with the Democrats it also gave me credibility Because they said Jesus your own are attacking you' Isn't that terrible' They felt sorry for me I didn't give a shit Fuck them Unless they got too personal then I'd take it personal

VASQUEZ What is your assessment of the director Alan Heslop and his perception of what the Rose Institute of State and Local Government should be?

ALATORRE I think he knew clearly what the Rose Institute of State and Local Government was Ah he's slick smart he's a good technician But you know it's under the guise of good government

VASQUEZ Well the main point they [Rose Institute of State and Local Government] make is that there is no competitiveness and what they want is competitiveness in districts

ALATORRE Competitiveness is in the eyes of the beholder Competitiveness is fairness for Republicans Uncompetitive districts are to the disadvantage of Republicans and that's why they're not

competitive They're academic whores I guess
 hit men under the guise of an exercise in
 political science But they're Everybody
 sees through them See they could have done it
 better if they hadn't been so aligned with the
 Republican party Then they could have done
 it Because then I think it would have been
 hard to attack them But because of the
 political activism of Heslop and people around
 him and who hired him it became the Republican
 think tank If they would have been smarter and
 picked up here and moved there--you know a
 little with Democrats a little Republican so
 that you never knew where they were--and did the
 same thing that they normally would do then they
 would have been much more dangerous But they
 were basically discredited from the get-go

VASQUEZ Is part of it that they are [located] at the
 Claremont college?

ALATORRE I don't even think it was at Claremont so much as
 it was the personalities and their relationships
 yes And unfortunately for Richard Santillán--
 God bless him--his credibility was lessened
 Even though he was with La Raza Unida and all his
 other rhetoric I mean it's all fine But you

know he didn't help himself in [some] circles by that connection

VASQUEZ He's there again

ALATORRE Oh yes He survived God bless him he has a job I'm not against people having jobs You know toward the end I think he developed respect for me Because I don't think he thought that I would craft a plan or get a plan that was as favorable to Chicanos as it was

VASQUEZ One of the things that doesn't come through in the literature and that I think we're in a position to contribute to is the role of the technician in reapportionment In your experience what is that role what should it be and is it out of hand has it become more important than it should be?

ALATORRE No See I think I had the best balance My technician was a numbers cruncher and he left the politics to me It's when you become totally dependent on the technician for the politics and for the numbers that the technician controls the whole process Where my guy made it very clear he's the technician I'm the politician

VASQUEZ Do you think that the Rose Institute of State and Local Government sometimes gets confused with

that?

ALATORRE Oh yes They're everything They are everything

[Interruption]

So you see that on the one hand you have the situation where the Dr Bruce Cains of the worlds allow the politics be dictated by me [the politician] They develop the program and the methodology to accomplish whatever objective we set out The Rose Institute of State and Local Government is the politician the technician and everything And that's why their worth is so great to the Republican party especially here in California and maybe in other states

VASQUEZ I don't understand that Expand a little bit more for me

ALATORRE Yeah because see

VASQUEZ Do they have no specialists in their party that ?

ALATORRE No You know they have the Tony Quinns of the world and everything else But they have not developed They're not computer literate And because the Rose Institute of State and Local Government can spit out so many things they then become dependent on the Rose Institute of State

and Local Government to You know Here's
what I want " And then the Rose Institute of
State and Local Government says This is what
you wanted this is what you get and this is why
this scenario's better than any you can come up
with So you become dependent on them

 The Bermans became important in this process
through Philip Burton [who] was the guru for
congressional reapportionment Congressional
reapportionment became important and the only
thing that was of importance to the Berman-Waxman
machine was when all of them decided that they
were going to join Henry Waxman in Congress If
they had not made that decision then they would
have just stuck to California Really only
caring about southern California for their power
and their influence And that's where they were
generated So they got it through Philip who
used Michael [Berman] And see I thought that
Michael He's a genius there's no doubt
about it I thought he had a lot but the
redistricting was all done by hand I thought
they were really computer literate and they had
it all They're geniuses at targetting mailing
and everything else and they had that down to a

science But they didn't have the same technology that would help them in redistricting Maybe because they never had anybody that gave them the money to get the computers and software to keep them current It costs a lot of money not only to develop it but to keep it current What we did in the assembly it's been kept current

VASQUEZ By?

ALATORRE Basically by Bruce Cain

VASQUEZ With what funding?

ALATORRE It was basically funded by political funds So that we will be ready in the legislature to--once that the census tapes come out--to begin the process

But coming back to the Berman-Waxman machine Philip made the Berman-Waxman important in the redistricting process But once that I saw what they had they had nothing They depended on us to really fine-tune the stuff They had ideas But because they did not have the computer capability they used us to do that Michael has become the political guru and technician who has served obviously Henry Waxman and Howard Berman's purposes Is it

healthy to the process when you're so totally dependent on one person or one group? I don't think it's necessarily healthy. Because they have their own agenda. And their agenda is not really the agenda of the whole [Democratic] party.

VASQUEZ Does this go to what you were saying earlier on the question of the accountability of a blue-ribbon commission of any kind where you seem to be one step removed from accountability and then you've got technicians that are going to work with them which sort of takes you another step away from any accountability?

ALATORRE Sure. I'll tell you what happened when the courts did it. What a lot of people don't know is that there was one political scientist who happened to have very close ties with one particular political party.

VASQUEZ Who was that?

ALATORRE Which was the guy out of Long Beach.

VASQUEZ Leroy [C] Hardy?

ALATORRE Leroy Hardy. Who had close connections with Philip when Philip was alive. And he depended on Leroy. Because Leroy was so intimidated by Philip that Philip knew he would do whatever [he

asked] and was totally loyal to Philip Because
he kind of like made him and Philip could
destroy him too So a lot of input was given
And somebody some faceless person drew up the
lines

Now Republicans in retrospect today say it
had to be a partisan that drew up the lines But
no it was supposedly the courts So that's a
classic example that reinforces the fact that
here you have a nameless body or a nameless
group of people that aren't accountable to
anybody--they sit as judge and jury--and a plan
is drafted Now was the plan objective and
fair? You ask the Republicans and they'll say

Of course not ' You ask the Democrats and
they'll say Of course it was So you know
it's political You can't take it out of it

VASQUEZ One talks to people that propose commissions and
they're sure that there is a feeling among the
electorate that they don't want the legislature
redistricting themselves And yet in the
eighties alone there have been at least four or
five initiatives to do precisely that And
they've all failed

ALATORRE I think it speaks to the fact that this is a

club a game of the club

VASQUEZ The political club?

ALATORRE Of course Does the general populace care about how this process is done? Some probably do But the greater masses of people are more concerned about what the government or their representatives are doing or not doing for them They don't have the luxury to worry about the nuances of gerrymandering and whether it's fair or not I believe that arguments--very persuasive arguments--were advanced as to what a farce the whole idea was about a nonpartisan commission or a group of people that was being advocated by these initiatives Who spent the money? Who spent the money for it? Republicans spent the money for it Democrats spent the money against it I would say if things were reversed I know I wouldn't spend any money to advance the idea of a commission I think that redistricting is an inherently political process and should be left in the hands of a political entity

VASQUEZ How do you assure accountability?

ALATORRE Well I think the accountability are the precedents that have been set The checks and balances are in the courts And if it's

blatantly without merit it is going to be thrown out by the courts I think that's the way you keep it I mean is it objective? No Redistricting isn't fair But you have constraints And if you live within those constraints then Nobody said that districts had to look pretty They had to be of equal population had to take into consideration one person one vote and all the other

VASQUEZ Ambiguity?

ALATORRE Yes and all the other nuances that had been established

VASQUEZ What were the characteristics or the I guess better put what were the guidelines that you set for yourselves when conducting the '81 reapportionment?

ALATORRE Number one was maintaining the majority in the state legislature undoing the historical gerrymandering and

[End Tape 6 Side B]

[Begin Tape 7 Side A]

ALATORRE I guess the ultimate test as to whether I did a good job or not is that we're now ending the decade of the eighties and moving into the decade of the nineties and the Democrats still have

control of the legislature So from that standpoint we were able to prevail I accomplished I guess the mission that I set out to Secondly the one thing I didn't comment on is that you look at growth in the state I had found this one guy that was kind of like a demographer and just kind of spends all of his time traveling all over the state We had the luxury of being able to send people into every county to look at development future as well as present--long-range planning as to where growth was going to take place And we tried to contain the growth in Democratic districts

VASQUEZ How would you do that?

ALATORRE By drawing lines in areas where growth was not going to take place and trying to contain it

VASQUEZ Make it as safe as possible?

ALATORRE Yes And basically give off the growth areas to Republicans Because historically the creation of suburbs The likelihood of Republicans having been strengthened by those suburbs is probably great

VASQUEZ Regardless of registration?

ALATORRE Regardless So we even did that There's only about two districts maybe three that even have

to worry about that problem One is in Sacramento because we didn't anticipate--even though it's taken ten years--the growth of this one district

VASQUEZ Would this be [Senator Albert S] Rodda's district?

ALATORRE No This is [Assemblyman Norman S] Waters

VASQUEZ Because he got hurt by that

ALATORRE Who's that?

VASQUEZ Rodda

ALATORRE Oh Rodda Well Rodda's [case was] just that the Democrats on the senate side did such a poor job in doing redistricting They didn't take that into consideration we did I mean Waters's first real test is going to come in 1990 and he's basically representing probably close to 200 000 more people now because of the growth in his district

Another one is in the Riverside area where new cities have been created We didn't think that it was going to come as fast as it did it came faster than we thought it would

VASQUEZ Whose district is that now?

ALATORRE It used to be [Assemblyman] Terry Gaggin's at the time we did redistricting Now it's [Assemblyman

Gerald] Jerry Eaves's He probably represents you know the size of two districts now because of the tremendous growth that's taken place But you know his politics are such that he's been able to do okay And probably the other area would be, is probably [Assemblyman] Dominic [L] Cortese even though we kind of limited

You know we limited the area where we thought the growth would take place and minimized it It's taken place not just faster but in even greater numbers than we thought it would happen

VASQUEZ What was the cost What kind of budget did you work with? What kind of money did Democrats spend in 1981?

ALATORRE A large budget I mean it was kind of like
I think we budgeted I think we had an initial budget of probably a million dollars just the Democrats And we also gave a budget to the Republicans so they couldn't cry that they didn't receive monies to be able to do their job So they probably got a similar amount What we actually spent probably would probably be in the range of a couple million dollars A lot of money

VASQUEZ Yes it is Now Republicans of course were not satisfied with the outcome of that redistricting, and they went to court In fact, they took a case all the way to the Supreme Court which only recently--about a year or so ago--was ruled not in their favor What do you anticipate will happen in the 1990?

ALATORRE Let me speak to that issue The irony of it all was that they double-crossed us

VASQUEZ Who did?

ALATORRE The Republicans

VASQUEZ How so?

ALATORRE Because we basically allowed them within the parameters we set out to fix the lines however they wanted to for their members We said "Okay this is our territory this is the territory we have given to your members Now if you want to adjust those lines to suit all of your members go ahead and do it But for that we didn't want to have to listen to [their] demagoguery and everything else We wanted our process to be smooth And that they weren't going to needlessly bicker and fight because we gave them the same percentage of districts that they had going in We gave them that same

percentage in the new plan Now you know what happened I don't know why but they weren't

VASQUEZ [inaudible]

ALATORRE Yeah It's kind of like they were accused of deals and everything else so I think they got nervous

VASQUEZ Do you think part of the rhetoric of the Reagan revolution " the upcoming Reagan revolution had anything to do with it? They thought maybe they could get a little more mileage out of that that they could get more leverage?

ALATORRE Well see I think they believed that they were entitled to more

VASQUEZ On the basis of what?

ALATORRE On the basis of presidential elections on the basis of how the Republicans did statewide and nationwide You know we put an end to that rhetoric I thought we were very fair Because I'll tell you I mean there were a few Republicans that weren't living in their district when I got through I didn't want to be totally mean-spirited but I wanted to get my point across And I got the point across when two Republicans were thrown into one district So after I showed them what could be done we then

decided Okay fine You don't like the configuration? This is where we're going if we can't get some agreement So you decide You either take this or we'll give you the opportunity of redrawing within these parameters and you can take and [distribute them] amongst Republicans however you want to do it ' They chose to do that There were a couple [who] weren't living in their house any longer They had a district but they weren't living in the district One was [Assemblywoman Marian] La Follette and Cathie Wright in one district We had Don Rogers and [Assemblyman Phillip D] Phil Wyman living in another So we basically had two incumbents in two different district So they worked it out amongst themselves And you know we didn't have to do that we could have been mean-spirited Because in one area even though I gave in for the sake of compromise we could have probably taken a seat--Kern County If we had drawn it the way that I had it But to compromise it was redone and basically made both Republicans safe

VASQUEZ What do you feel that the Republicans learned from the 1980 reapportionment?

ALATORRE That the party which controls the beginning of each decade controls redistricting And you know they cried foul and they yelled and screamed Yet you look at example after example of even a worse process being followed in other states where Republicans had control So they were trying to be self-righteous We at least had hearings They did criticize me because they didn't see maps but the reason they didn't see maps is that they were changing amongst each other up to the day that we had a plan So it was virtually impossible to produce maps and be sure that those maps were correct That's what they learned And they tried to

[Interruption]

You know that's why they're busy doing their business right now I think the Democrats conceivably could be in trouble if we can't win the gubernatorial race even though I believe we can win the legislative races

VASQUEZ It will hurt you that bad?

ALATORRE Well yes You're not going to get an agreement I don't think you're going to see a sitting Republican governor go along with a Democratic redistricting plan And unless we can

capture two-thirds of both houses we'll never see a plan And I think it could conceivably go to the courts

VASQUEZ Are you as comfortable now with the notion of it going to court as you might have been in the past?

ALATORRE Oh no

VASQUEZ Have the courts changed their [makeup] at all?

ALATORRE Well the courts obviously have become more and more conservative And I think recent decisions would only at least serve to reinforce the position that I take Yes I'd be very uncomfortable going to court Even though we were able to get Republican justices to agree with us even on our plan Because they couldn't cite violations They tried but they couldn't bring it home I went to listen to the arguments before the [California] Supreme Court on our plan I mean they were such specious arguments that it was really having to stretch it for a justice to even agree because we didn't violate [the law] We had better population figures and less deviation We had compactness by and large We split fewer cities than even Republicans did

VASQUEZ That's one of the biggest criticisms that you have being made on the Republican side and you definitely had that criticism coming out of the Rose Institute of State and Local Government That the Democrats don't care at all about communities or about cities

ALATORRE Well they do the same thing It's all a question of who has it [power] and how it's exercised The one that doesn't will make the same argument One time at one of the [television] programs I made the arguments for the Republican party even before the Republican got on He said exactly the same thing about what was wrong with the process You know people are less than honest You become very virtuous when you're not in power and you're less virtuous and you are not singing the same tune when you are Fair' and equitable " as I stated were the two buzzwords I used throughout the process I determined what was fair and equitable If the Republicans were in power they'd talk about fair and equitable and they would determine They have a different perspective and a different viewpoint of what it is I have a different viewpoint of what fair and

equitable may be

VASQUEZ One of the criticisms one also hears is that there are no rules to the game that there really are no rules about what you reapportion

ALATORRE There are rules

VASQUEZ and that at least there should be one rule and that is "competitiveness Does that sound familiar to you?

ALATORRE Competitiveness? Well yes of course That's a nice phrase to use Nowhere in any decision on redistricting has the argument of competitiveness ever been advanced that has been successful Now competitiveness to them [Republicans] would be districts that they have no control over They know where the districts that they have control over there's no way to make them competitive Then what do you do? Do you deliberately gerrymander to make them competitive? And is that type of gerrymandering okay? I don't think so

VASQUEZ There is more public talk now probably than there has been in a long time about incumbency Do you think that kind of rhetoric or political discourse could work against the Democrats linked to this notion of competitiveness if the

Republicans use it correctly in 1990?

ALATORRE Well you know I think it could go either way

VASQUEZ Tell me why

ALATORRE Well the idea Throw the rotten scoundrels out And Let's have fair elections so that the people can truly choose Well the politicians don't control elections You know pygmies don't control elections Advocates against competitiveness don't control the elections Advocates for competitiveness don't control the elections People ultimately make a decision as to the kind of government and the kind of representative they want And if even when the person they initially made the decision that they wanted that person isn't accountable to the electorate then that person is thrown out of office But something is happening so that people continue to reelect certain individuals and defeat others Every two years in legislative races accountability is tested When the election ends somebody wins somebody loses Obviously the loser is going to say that it wasn't fair But the people made that decision neither one of the candidates made that decision

VASQUEZ You feel pretty confident about that that voters will sort out what they want and don't want?

ALATORRE I think voters are becoming more and more discriminating about whom they vote into office There's more and more people that will vote for a person rather than for a party Why is it that some politicians exceed the registration in their district as a margin of victory? They're able to get votes I was able to get votes on both sides of the aisle when I was in the legislature as were candidates against me able to get votes on both sides of the aisle when they ran against me So elections are the true test

VASQUEZ If the election is really the true test of the individual candidate why is it slates are used so effectively in some parts of California--the Westside [of Los Angeles] for example?

ALATORRE Well people are dependent on slates to make decisions They make them of their own free will nobody forces them to vote for that slate As I think I've mentioned in the past, and it's a real sad commentary many times the quality of officeholder is better than what people deserve Because it's people that elect

him If they elect somebody that they later on
complain about as being corrupt as being
nonresponsive and continuing to vote that person
into office then there's something wrong with
the process Then enough people [must] not feel
the way that maybe you [do] about the
responsiveness or nonresponsiveness of that given
candidate

[End Tape 7 Side A]

[Session 7 November 9 1989]

[Begin Tape 8 Side A]

VASQUEZ Councilman we've talked about different aspects of your legislative career Why don't we begin to sum up some of what we've been discussing because I think it might take us into areas that might perhaps need a little more in depth discussion So as not to carry this [discussion] on longer than it has to be let's start first of all with the question of legislative reforms and what appears to be a recurrent problem of ethical and conflict-of-interest problems As someone [who] served for thirteen years in the state legislature what do you think are the reforms that really need to take place and what are the problems that reforms may not even answer?

ALATORRE Well I think first of all you have to pay legislators commensurate with their responsibilities Here in [the city of] Los Angeles we deal with a budget of \$3 billion In essence, we're the board of directors of a \$3

billion corporation At the state level we're talking about a \$40 billion corporation And for a business that big with the responsibilities that legislators have at the city and at the state level legislators are not compensated at a level commensurate with their responsibilities That's one problem I think if it isn't addressed there'll be recurrent stories written about legislators and money that possibly changes hands and the like--many times because of economic necessity

In terms of the hold that some people feel legislative advocates have on the legislative process so long as campaigns cost as much as they do and continue to escalate and so long as there is a need to raise this money from people interested in the political process there will be continuing stories about the influence and the growing influence of certain interest groups in the state and in the city of Los Angeles So you have to ask yourself What is the answer?" The only answer I can see to put an end to alleged control by various interest groups in the legislative process and undue influence is for the people to be the only individuals that a

legislator is accountable to The way you get that is by having public financing of political campaigns [Anything] short of that only perpetuates the control incumbents have and the power that they have Anything short of public financing makes honest people turn dishonest as a means of trying to get around whatever reforms are being legislated today It also restricts and doesn't expand people's participation in the political process Interest groups that have membership will always be able to get around the reforms that have been passed up to now And instead of opening up the process you soon begin to [limit] the process to the very same interest groups that you're attempting to regulate and to discourage from having as big of an influence in the political affairs at the state and at the local level The tragedy is that people talk about all of this unethical conduct by politicians but they are unwilling to do what I think has to be done if we are talking about accountability to those that help elect them It is a real dilemma If people want real reform nothing short of public financing is really going to give

VASQUEZ There's a movement afoot to put an initiative on the ballot that would limit the terms that a legislator could serve Is that maybe part of the solution?

ALATORRE I think that is so shortsighted and doesn't in my eyes do anything to improve the performance or improve the quality of the legislative bodies The ultimate accountability is every election If somebody is bad and the people feel that person is bad then they kick him out of office It takes a number of years for most people to even begin to understand the legislative process

VASQUEZ Tell me how long you think it takes an assemblyman these days to become a well-versed technician and

ALATORRE Well some never get it But I would say that more than likely it probably takes two terms three terms It's much faster now than it was before when I first got elected when seniority many times dictated Committees and the like you now that's been kind of thrown out because of the rapid change of the legislature today And people not staying around long either getting defeated or being disillusioned and

moving on to some other endeavor But I think it's a very shortsighted measure because I believe that if somebody isn't good then the people in the respective areas have the right to kick that person out I think you're going to lose a lot of talent And today there is some question as to the quality and the caliber of people seeking public office I would equate that to a lot of the alleged reforms that are taking place that sooner or later are perpetuating only a certain class of person running for public office Instead of improving the quality and diversity of a body you're slowly cutting out that diversity It's really coming down to only either the rich or people that haven't made it in other professions are running for political office

VASQUEZ What is your--to ask a specific before I go back to a general question--assessment of [Attorney General] John K Van de Kamp running in essence for governor against the legislature?

ALATORRE In his eyes it is a smart political move to do that to run as the outsider Because that is a popular theme you know "Kick the bastards out of office " But he is intellectually dishonest

because he is part of the club that he is purporting to be running against

VASQUEZ Some legislators have argued that he shouldn't do that Even if he were to win he's got to work with the legislature later on

ALATORRE He has to work with the legislature But you know why attack the very institution that you are a part of? See I have great problems with people who are in public office tearing down the very institution that they are a part of I believe the institution has to be made more efficient and better But to tear it down is to me the height of dishonesty Get out and tear it down But if you're in it it seems to me that you would be in it to improve it not destroy it And what John Van de Kamp is doing-- and I understand it I understand stepping [back] and looking at it--is he's trying to ride a theme that is popular in many circles But he is not being very honest He is part of the institution that he is complaining about and what he is saying is less than honest that these ethical reforms have to take place Granted they do But not running against the very body that you are going to have to work with if you want to be

successful as governor

VASQUEZ What in your assessment has been the role and/or the value of the Fair Political Practices Commission?

ALATORRE Well I think it's been a windfall for accountants It's been a windfall for lawyers It has provided some regulation of lobbyists better reporting more accurate reporting of monies that are contributed to campaigns So it hasn't been all that bad I think that it has accomplished some good A lot of it is determined by the aggressiveness or the lack of it by the members of that commission Has it stopped these outrageous stories about the system? No Has it created a movement of constructive reform? In some cases it has

VASQUEZ Where do you think it's been effective?

ALATORRE I think [in] more truthful reporting of monies both collected and expended

VASQUEZ Some people argue that it's weak on the enforcement or has no real enforcement power Is that a problem?

ALATORRE I don't believe that is necessarily true I think that it has civil remedies And it can impose monetary fines It wasn't designed to be

a criminal investigative body That is the jurisdiction of the attorney general or the prosecutorial bodies in municipal entities There have been a lot of things I don't think it has been able to accomplish I think it was sold as you know Let's kick and throw the criminals or people the wrongdoers out of office " You know I don't think that's what happened I think what has happened in my eyes in all of these reforms that are emotionally very popular what has resulted has been a climate of not wanting to involve yourself not wanting to see your name in the newspaper I think it has helped lawyers find holes in the very reform measures to skirt the law

VASQUEZ Some ex-members of that commission--in fact even a chairman--have taken on remunerated assignments since leaving that body to help people having problems with the rules of that body

ALATORRE Of course

VASQUEZ Do you find that to be something of a contradiction?

ALATORRE I think if you look at it strictly and objectively of course It might not be necessarily very consistent Rather

inconsistent But it's no different than people who have become experts in certain areas--say legislators--where firms if they're lawyers hire them specifically because they're either the drafters of the law and they know how it's applied and how to work it You know they certainly

VASQUEZ In other words they're technicians?

ALATORRE They're technicians sure

VASQUEZ And what about in an area that deals with ethics right and wrong and fairness and something called the 'Fair Political Practices Act?

ALATORRE I think intellectually it's dishonest But in reality there's nothing dishonest about it It's not a violation of a law from the strict sense of the law

VASQUEZ I'm wondering if in the spirit of the law it is

ALATORRE Oh of course in the spirit of it I think it's less than honest

VASQUEZ Apart from the cost what other reforms ?

ALATORRE I think first of all you have to increase the salary to remove the temptation Something has to be done If you pay a person

VASQUEZ You then disallow any kind of outside income? Is that what it means to you?

ALATORRE No I don't think that is

VASQUEZ That's what some of the problems have supposedly been recently

ALATORRE Well if you pay a person [enough] then there's no reason But as long as the remuneration is where it is today you know some people have families that they have to help educate [children] and the like it's not enough money

VASQUEZ Okay that's personal remuneration Now the way you would get around the question of the cost of running for office and staying in office would be public finance?

ALATORRE Public financing is the only way

VASQUEZ How about limiting the amount spent by all candidates?

ALATORRE That obviously is a windfall for incumbents Because they don't need to spend as much That doesn't help nonincumbents

VASQUEZ Over time it might though wouldn't it?

ALATORRE How can you do it? I mean

VASQUEZ There's no way?

ALATORRE Yes if the guy keeps on running Then yes over time maybe you may say that There's never going to be a level playing field Maybe you can look at it if a person is stupid enough

VASQUEZ Well realistically can you expect a level playing field when you've got an incumbent especially if he's done a good job?

ALATORRE It's very difficult Very difficult No I don't think you can You can try and even it but I don't know if it's ever going to be even Certainly with public financing you take the 'Third House of power' out of the legislature By limiting the amount of money spent in a campaign you don't have to raise as much money to finance all of the different campaigns Cutting down on honorariums if there is an equitable salary I think those things are probably real I think all these campaign limitation laws and everything else I think all of that's ridiculous Because all you do is find ways to get around it To me the amount is probably more important than how much a person can give

VASQUEZ You think the removal of those pressures from legislature would make the legislature be less stagnant than it appears to be so that we have so many [ballot] initiatives ?

ALATORRE See what people don't realize is that everybody speaks from their own frame of reference And

everybody speaks from an uneducated perspective
As an example something as simple as "redlining"
in automobile insurance How can we tolerate
that? We should abolish it See what you have
to understand is that there are other areas that
are going to be impacted Even though here in
Los Angeles that is the most heavily impacted by
redlining we should abolish that But to
legislate it on a statewide basis there are
other people [who] are going to be hurt by
abolishing redlining There are some areas that
do not have that problem so consequently they
aren't that sympathetic Everything is just not
what it appears It's a very complex balancing
act for anything [to be] done So while the
legislature may appear to be stagnant in reality
it may not be It's just that many things are so
damn difficult because there are so many nuances
that most people do not understand Take away
the influence of certain segments of society
then they would not have the alleged control that
they do of the legislative process I look at it
this way If a person is a whore he is a whore
whether he is a legislator or he is something
else If somebody is going to be influenced by

money he's going to be influenced by money in any other arena But to say that everybody is influenced by money I think is unfair And to feel just because a person receives X amount of dollars from an interest group that has swayed his vote on a given issue I think is unfortunate and not true But yes there are people that may be unethical" and may be influenced But the great majority of legislators are not

VASQUEZ So do the rules of the game and the way things are structured lend themselves more towards the fall of those who are dishonest anyway? Is that it?

ALATORRE Yes sometimes it just takes longer People who are dishonest should be rooted out of the system Because it affects the very institution that I am a part of that I respect that I spend--and I take it seriously--spend a lot of hours trying to do my job And anytime that there are allegations against corrupt politicians there's an impact on the entire profession and the entire system or the entire institution that I'm a part of And nobody wants that

VASQUEZ Do you feel the California legislature is a good

school for people who want to go on to higher office?

ALATORRE I think it's probably the best legislative body in the entire country

VASQUEZ What makes it so?

ALATORRE Its professionalism I think the caliber and the quality of its members is being eroded very drastically

VASQUEZ By?

ALATORRE By the publicity the restrictions Its diversity is being threatened with every election And I'm afraid the direction that we are moving in is in the direction of mediocrity and only certain people are getting into that body If I had to do it over again and I was raising a family I have to be very honest with you I don't know if I could make it financially But I got into it much earlier At that time you know things were affordable But it's getting to the point where it's almost virtually impossible for a person who does not have economic resources outside of being a member of the legislature It's very very difficult

VASQUEZ That's why you say the diversity perhaps is being eroded?

ALATORRE Sure Because you're getting people who can afford to run You're also getting people who are not necessarily the most successful in other pursuits

VASQUEZ In their own field endeavor?

ALATORRE Yes I think it would be a sad commentary if all we got in the legislature were social workers

VASQUEZ How about attorneys?

ALATORRE I think that would be a sad commentary too

VASQUEZ Why did you decide to come to the Los Angeles City Council from the assembly rather than to the [state] senate or to the Congress of the United States?

ALATORRE I think at one time if the opportunity would have come I would have wanted to be a member of Congress That opportunity didn't present itself When the opportunity came when the possibility of this office opening up came [it was] at a time when I more than likely would have had to have gotten into an ugly political fight that

[Interruption]

I've gotten into so many political fights for others that I would have preferred not to But because of a sense of loyalty and the like I got

myself into them And here it was going to be revisited again And up to this time pretty much I have put my ambitions aside for others And I started looking at this possibility

VASQUEZ Of Congress?

ALATORRE No Of the city council And my first reaction was 'Why not?' But on the other side Why do I want to leave the legislature when I was at that period probably one of three or four who ran the legislature I mean it was something that I thought about I looked at the positive And the positive side was that Los Angeles from the Chicano perspective is where it's at It is going through such drastic change Why not be in the forefront of that change and help to mold the direction? Secondly I was born and raised in Los Angeles and I wasn't thinking of living anywhere else And I looked at the possibilities of it and I made that decision to run People speculated immediately I was making it to run for mayor That wasn't a consideration a real consideration It was something that still was out there

VASQUEZ How about [Los Angeles County] supervisor?

ALATORRE That wasn't a real consideration at the time

Certainly it is a consideration now And I'll be very honest with you For the first year I mean I kicked myself day in and day out because I thought maybe I had made the wrong decision

VASQUEZ [You thought] you should have stayed up there?

ALATORRE Yes

VASQUEZ What was it that was hard in that transition? Tell me about it

ALATORRE The difficulty is it's a fishbowl

VASQUEZ More so than Sacramento?

ALATORRE In Sacramento you can get lost Here there is nowhere to hide Your time constraints are much greater The problems that I had the first year with the whole new campaign finance law ¹

VASQUEZ Tell me about that in a minute

ALATORRE I mean an incredible amount of work that had to be done Just getting adjusted to a new legislative body whose principles were not the same as the legislature I came from where your word meant something

VASQUEZ Let's get into that 'The principles of it [the city council] are different What does that

¹ In 1986 Alatorre was fined for allegedly using funds from his assembly war chest for his city council candidacy

mean?

ALATORRE Well they're very basic The only thing you have as a man is your word And when you give your word you [should be able to] take it to the bank Here a person's word means nothing

VASQUEZ Why is it so much different than the state legislature? More countervailing pressures?

ALATORRE I just think it's a fact of the body It's always been that way Why? I don't know I have no idea But it's kind of like some members will say Well yes but you made a commitment Well commitments are made to be broken That is their response to breaking their commitment

VASQUEZ You wouldn't hear that in the state legislature?

ALATORRE Hm-mmm [negative]

VASQUEZ At least not more than once? [Laughter]

ALATORRE Yes After that that individual would be isolated and he'd be totally ineffective Here it's kind of a fact of life Second in the legislature--and maybe it's a creature of partisan politics--you gravitate toward leadership Here you gravitate toward mediocrity A mediocre leader doesn't threaten whatever your agenda may be People in the

legislature usually have certain interests
burning desires and interests in certain areas
and they work steadfastly on those things Here
you can do whatever you want be a leader be a
follower be invisible Whatever it is you want
to be as a councilman you can be

VASQUEZ Are there more chances for leadership on the
other hand here? That's what I hear you saying

ALATORRE No because it's such a disjointed disorganized
body that it's difficult to form coalitions based
on leadership It just doesn't happen

VASQUEZ Would a larger [body] follow any of that?

ALATORRE I don't think that's the issue

VASQUEZ The rules of the game need to be changed?

ALATORRE The rules of the game no It's got to be the
people themselves But you have people that get
caught up in being one-fifteenth of the city

VASQUEZ What does that mean? Parochial about ?

ALATORRE Yes very parochial about their district and
everything And I respect that I don't have a
problem with that But there's a greater issue
and people are dictated more by how it plays in
their district than whether it's right for the
city

VASQUEZ Can you give me an example?

ALATORRE Whether it's trash and the fact that there's a
 need to solve it and to solve it means incon-
 venience They'd rather put it in the back-
 ground because "My district doesn't want
 landfills

[End Tape 8 Side A]

[Session 8 November 10 1989]

[Begin Tape 9 Side A]

VASQUEZ We were talking about the kinds of preparation that the assembly gives you for higher office or different public service You instead of moving to what conventional wisdom would indicate to higher office--Congress or the United States Senate--you came to a city council You were recounting some of the problems that you saw in the so-called "rules of the game"--or non-rules--and how that leads in your mind to mediocrity Do you want to expand on that?

ALATORRE Well what I learned in the legislature--and I think it's really in life--your only worth is your word as a man And when your word ceases to mean anything then to me your worth as a man is nothing As an example of what I learned the rule to be in Sacramento is that hey you give your word and whether [or not] at the time you gave it you had all the information your word is

your word Here your word doesn't mean anything because this is just the way it's been There are very few people that once they tell you they're with you are going to stay with you I mean I can't even count on five of the fifteen whose word is worth a damn Nonpartisan politics--interestingly--at least in Los Angeles gravitates toward mediocrity Leadership is determined by the person who is the most acceptable and the least troublesome the least of a problem in whatever you want to do as a member of the city council So consequently they elect people like a [Councilman] John Ferraro Beautiful man and everything else, but they didn't elect him because they wanted an effective leader as much as they wanted a figurehead who would not be a threat

VASQUEZ Who's they ?

ALATORRE The members of the city council

VASQUEZ So they help elect one another?

ALATORRE They helped elect him yes

VASQUEZ Tell me about how that works

ALATORRE Well I'll give you an example Basically, I put the thing [race for council president] together

for John Ferraro And at the time I wanted one particular committee We got him elected and then when it came down to him delivering he had excuses as to why he couldn't do it I'll always remember that We still have a relationship He still is a nice man and everything else If anything he tries to do everything he can for me thinking that's going to make up for not delivering on his commitment to me at the time he was elected president of the city council And I treat him nice and everything else But in my mind

VASQUEZ Give me another example of how that operates Especially if you can do it against a backdrop of the kinds of

ALATORRE Okay I'll give you another example I'll give you another example in terms of a person's word When I did the redistricting the whole idea was to get votes My agenda was clear I was going to create a seat for Chicanos And the natural one prior to the death of [Councilman] Howard Finn was [Councilman Michael] Mike Woo's seat So I put together a plan and Mike Woo was going to be the district for Chicanos What I

did is that I not only packed it with Chicanos but I also unified the Asians. The Asians loved the plan. Because they were historically split up into three districts. I put in all the Asian communities of interest. I had Chinatown and I had Little Tokyo in there. I had the Korean community united and everything else.

VASQUEZ: With the idea to do what?

ALATORRE: An idea to justify

VASQUEZ: An Asian district?

ALATORRE: No. To justify a Chicano district. But in the process, he would have to argue against the interest of his own community.

VASQUEZ: [Laughter]

ALATORRE: And he did. Of course, the Asians basically had to come and say the opposite of what they testified during the hearings in opposition to Mike Woo being in the district where all the Chicanos were going to be put in. I put together the votes. I gave a district to [Councilman] Joel Wachs that in his life, he could have never wanted anything better. He had the highest percentage of renters--and he is like the godfather of rent control. I put the gays in his

district I did everything imaginable for his vote And he gave me his vote But when it came down to the override he double-crossed He didn't tell me until about three minutes before the vote was taken that he had decided to go the other way His reasoning was that Mike Woo may run against him That was his rationale And there was that possibility But Mike would have never been able to beat him But he turned around and voted against overriding the mayor's veto Here I did everything that was conceivable to make him happy He'd have never had a problem and the guy double-crossed You know you don't do that Joel Wachs's day is coming Because he's known for that for double-crossing And there are a lot of others [whose] word doesn't mean a thing That's what makes it very difficult to work with people When you can't trust them once they tell you I mean you've got to get their commitment a minute before something comes up--or reaffirm it--because it's easier for them to go the other way It's sad There's no sense of collegiality there's no sense of team playing or anything

else in the city council So what I've been able to learn is that mediocrity rules You gravitate toward mediocrity because when you have leadership that's mediocre they're no threat to whatever you want to do as a city councilperson there's no threat involved to you know if you're interested in accomplishing things

VASQUEZ So is it more difficult to get things done here?

ALATORRE Yes it's much more difficult

VASQUEZ In a smaller body?

ALATORRE Not so much [because it is] a smaller body The numbers are not the issue What is the issue is that there are no rules And maybe at one time there was the old boy network They say that old-style politics was bad But what is wrong with somebody whose word you can take to the bank whose style is one of trying to build rather than to tear down? Sometimes you might wonder whether the old-style politics isn't more honest than the new politics ' which for me is intellectually dishonest

VASQUEZ By the new politics you mean responding to many invariant pressure points in your constituents?

ALATORRE Yes the reformer you know We're the new breed of politician ' you know We're against the old boy network" and everything else I'm not so sure that more wasn't accomplished under that system because you knew what the price was Today there are no rules Consequently it makes it that much more difficult to get anything done The idea of "Hey I owe you when you do something for somebody that that person needs

And you go back and tell him Hey you know I need you Oh well I'm sorry Gee I really would like to but you know it's against my philosophy or My constituents really feel very strongly about that What does that have to do with anything? When he needed something he didn't want to hear me telling him Oh my constituents ' or anything else As an example I tried to help him I helped him And then I went back and I said "Hey I need this " Oh they'll find every excuse in the world Now these are the quote "reformists " They're bigger whores in my eyes than the ones that you know what their price is Give me the old-style politician and I can work with that

one Because that person is more honest in the final analysis than the new breed who are intellectually dishonest and they're bigger whores than people whose price you know on a given issue

VASQUEZ Here in Los Angeles you have--and it's been reaffirmed by a recent spread in the Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine--the image of a power broker of a person who likes to put deals together in back rooms ¹ Some political gadflies in the Mexican-American community have even said as much in the Los Angeles Times and another newspaper [Los Angeles Herald-Examiner]--well when we had another newspaper--editorials Does that bother you? Is that an image that you engender?

ALATORRE No I think that they totally misunderstand what I'm really all about You know I'll be very honest with you I don't spend every waking hour of the day wondering how I'm going to build power for Richard Alatorre or that anybody that I've

¹ Boyarsky Bill Crossover Dreams Los Angeles Times Magazine (October 22 1989) 8-18

helped is so beholden to me that they cannot do anything on their own. If anything, probably one of the biggest mistakes I've made is that I haven't held them accountable for everything that I've done [for them]. You know, I just figure that I've used my resources to help out a lot of people. And I just figure that in the final analysis, they're going to do the right thing and they're going to be good on the issues that I think are important to the community. I haven't held them accountable. But yet I'm criticized that anybody I help is in my back pocket. I don't help somebody and tell them before I help them. Hey, you got to do everything that I want.

VASQUEZ: You're not the "godfather" then?

ALATORRE: No, I'm not. You know, I don't try to be a godfather. Yes, I think they're correct that I believe in working towards something. I'm not just interested in talking about something and hoping that it gets done. I like to get things done. Maybe the way that I go about getting them done may be suspect in the eyes of some. But I get them done. I carry through something. I'm

not just one that opens his mouth and meow-meows about a given subject and then moves onto the next topic without ever getting your hands dirty and trying to get something done No I try and see it to its end back room deals and everything Sometimes they're in the front room They're not always in the back room And I hear Dr [Rodolfo] Acuña criticizing me but then on the other hand he paid me the greatest compliment--that I'm the closest equivalent to a Jesse Unruh To me that's a compliment The man probably did more to modernize the political process in the legislature than any single person Now I don't think that I'm of that caliber but

VASQUEZ Are you of that school of political method?

ALATORRE You know I'm into the ends And so I guess whatever it means you know the ends justify the means

VASQUEZ One of the issues that's very provocative has to do with development and overdevelopment In recurring [press] write-ups from political opponents you've gotten the charge of being tied into development and the overdevelopment of

Olvera Street and all that

ALATORRE Let me tell you my philosophy about that First of all we as a community have never benefited [from] all the good things that come as a result of development We have a lot of needs We have housing needs that are of a critical magnitude We have economic needs because we have a lot of people We have the human potential but we have a lot of people unemployed We need to create opportunities for people I look at development as a means not only for job creation but also to improve a downward spiral of many of our communities I'm not for development for the sake of development But nobody is going to argue that we don't have critical needs in the area of housing We have to provide those opportunities And we have to provide the environment so that we can begin to reap the good that comes from development It's unacceptable for nine families to live in a single-family home People aren't living there because they want to but because they have to

Now are we going to continue to allow that to happen for the sake of people under the guise

of maintaining the integrity of their communities? What they really are saying is "I don't want anymore Mexicans in my neighborhood And whatever is bad about what we have is because we have too many And all of these new developments are creating all of our social problems " A lot of the social problems are as a result of the lack of economic vitality of communities so pressuring our existing housing stock that it begins to deteriorate I don't buy the concept of "slow growth whose definition I use as a guy that just closed escrow and then all of a sudden is interested in no growth We can't afford that

You and I have options We can move to almost any area that we want But there are people who have absolutely no options But they are seeking options I think it's our responsibility to try and help them to have some options rather than having to live in a single-family with eight other families forty people in a home That's a reality in Boyle Heights And I even tell the Mexican yuppies that fall into the same trap as some of these white do-gooders

and say Well you know we have to maintain the integrity of our communities And I tell them I say "Yes it's fine for you and me to talk about that ' I say But you know what? I represent people that don't have the same options that you and I have And they have a right to be given options to live in a decent home or have a decent place to live And they don't Why do we have to suffer for the greed in West Los Angeles? We didn't create that problem But yet they allowed the problem And yet their solution is no growth After they've allowed for the raping of their own areas Then they want to impose it on everybody else? On people or on communities that have not had or received the benefits of it? I say that's wrong That's where I'm coming from And yes it flies counter to some There are five people that say they're against the project all of the sudden they're going to go against it whether the project is good or bad If it's bad fine But to go against a project that is going to provide some opportunities for people because those who have don't want anybody else to have that's wrong

VASQUEZ What's the Olvera Street development going to provide?

ALATORRE The Olvera Street development is totally misunderstood I want the same things that the merchants [Olvera Street Merchants Association] want There's only one basic problem It's that the merchants want it for free And they've had it for free They think they are Olvera Street Yes they've been there But if you look at the conditions of Olvera Street today what have they done to put back some of the things that they have been able to get? They've done nothing There has to be revitalization Every one of the structures is seismically unsafe They have to be brought up to code Nobody is interested in doing it What we're doing is that we have developed an RFP [request for proposals] that allows them up to 50 percent equity in the development for the merchants if they can raise the money I am committed to maintaining the integrity of the street the cultural and historical nature of that street But also to accomplish those things you must have an economically viable plan I'm not

interested in making it a fucking Disneyland or a Knott's Berry Farm or a fast food outlet No I want to maintain the integrity of it But I want to bring back some vitality I want to have a place where people will say This is beautiful "

VASQUEZ Small merchants say they can't afford to make it there that way They'll be thrown out and only large corporations will be able to [benefit]

ALATORRE I don't believe that to be true Yes we don't need twenty taco stands That's true But we have to have puestos [stands] and everything else You see the number going down every year It's a tourist attraction But we have to have an attraction that is clean that we can take pride in And unfortunately whoever is to blame it has gone downhill I think we have to bring it up to the level where not only is it a place where all of us can be proud of but we have to bring the buildings up to seismic safety We have to clean up Olvera Street and have things that are going to be attractive to people Yes it's going to require an economic infusion of money But they have that right The

merchants have a right individually or collectively right off the bat whatever the developer who goes in there has to It's written in the RFP that 50 percent equity is allowed for the merchants Now they can either choose to do it individually or collectively but they have a right to equity up to 50 percent There has never been an RFP that sets out the parameters for a developer He's got to allow them to have that equity if they can come up with the money We have developed an RFP [of which] the merchants signed off And they signed off on it under the terms that they weren't going to get it at the back end but get it in the front end They didn't want to be developers They said If we can't agree to the conditions then we're going to want to be codevelopers of it " And I said Fine But if we can come up with something that satisfies the concerns you have I don't want you to turn around and say that you want it all We satisfied them And then they turned around and said Hey we also want to be developers ' Well if I would have known that going in I would have never negotiated How do

you negotiate with somebody that automatically has a They have it on their side going in because the contract or the RFP was framed to give them the advantage Well you know to me there's nothing that prohibits them But they lied And they didn't negotiate in good faith That doesn't set well with me You know I expect when I spent a year in trying to frame an RFP that takes into consideration that bends over backwards to help out the merchants that they're going to be true to their word Well they weren't If I'd have known that going in hell I would have developed a different RFP and let them all compete I don't have any problem with them wanting to be developers But it's kind of like you develop the RFP that's going to favor you and then you say Well I want it in the front and in the back end You can't do that So morally there is an obvious appearance of a conflict of interest When they developed the RFP and it's developed to favor them and then they go ahead and then they want it all it's not right They lay claim that Yeah well we are Olvera Street Well if they are it seems to

me that they would have put something back into something which has made them a lot of money
But they didn't

VASQUEZ We could talk about many many facets of city-council politics maybe in another interview we could do that But let me probe something that is of interest I think to this interview At this point in the development of the Mexican-American community--and you've had twenty years or more to see the development of that--what kinds of politics are needed?

ALATORRE To me I think we have room for all styles But I think that we have to mature as a people to being concerned about how we accomplish and how we meet whatever ends we set out rather than the mentality that It doesn't matter so who cares? or "All we are is a bunch of screaming idiots that do not understand how the political process functions ' See to me we don't need people to run for office and run a good campaign and lose We need to win And who wins hopefully are people that share a commitment to giving back a little to the community that has afforded them the opportunity to succeed People get caught up

with themselves once they're in [office] and are more interested in the rhetoric and lack the follow-through to accomplish whatever it is that they are advocating. We need people that understand how to get things done. Politics is the art of compromise. And we have to know not only how to count to get what we want to pass a measure. Whether it is eight on the city council of fifteen which is a majority or if there is a need for two-thirds that we can count to ten so that a measure can become law. That's basic and fundamental. And people that are not going to operate in a vacuum and lack the ability to bring people together to form coalitions to accomplish certain things. I mean that's what we need. We don't need to be on the outside looking in; we have to be on the inside looking out. But when we're on the inside, not forget that there are a lot of things that people talk about on the outside that we have to help on the inside accomplish. And you know we have people that allegedly are involved in politics that range from individuals that will espouse things and hope that they never get accomplished because

then they lose their platform

VASQUEZ Give me an example of someone like that

ALATORRE Oh I mean Individuals?

VASQUEZ Yes

ALATORRE Yes Raul Ruiz and people like of his ilk that

You know I learned a long time ago that
they don't want to see anything done because
then they lose their platform to complain

VASQUEZ Do some of the people involved in immigration
have that aptitude?

ALATORRE Yes you know unfortunately the Tony
Rodríguezes of the world and everything else
It's kind of like you know And I've run
you know I understand leftist politics man
And you know the revolution' You know
they want to maintain the revolution But to
maintain the revolution they've got to make sure
that things never get done Because then there's
no revolution We don't need that I mean you
know our community doesn't need people like
that What our community needs are people that

VASQUEZ But they're there They're there they attract

ALATORRE And I can work with them You know I've worked with them You know I don't fall in love with their bullshit But sure they're there And many times some of the times man they have you know they talk about And they bring some things that are right They're not always wrong But they just don't know how to get things done Nor do they want to get things done because then they cease to be quote leaders' to which they have proclaimed themselves as And they lose the platform to speak

VASQUEZ Are we hurting for leadership in this community?

ALATORRE Oh sure Sure

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE Because unfortunately hey you know what? We have people that have abilities But you know we're at the level of political maturation that we're more caught up with the style than we are with the ability to get things done You know we get swept off our feet 'Oh look at him! Look at how he talks'" Not what he says but Look at how he talks ' You know A lot of times people lack substance but they sound

good All right? You know we have And
we need people like that You know we need
people at all levels of the political spectrum
But we all have to understand one thing that you
know we shouldn't take our dirty laundry
outside You know we have people man that are
so good at tearing our own rather than tearing
the man that is the real enemy We love to kind
of like tear our own And that's part of the
vicious cycle of powerlessness you know It's
easier to tear and criticize those that we know
rather than the unknown which you know becomes
much harder And that doesn't take us
anywhere People always say Look at them
Look at the Mexicans You know all they do is
kill each other ' And we've been very good at
that But that really hasn't moved us you know
very far You know we need to develop the kind
of leadership that totally understands what the
political process is all about It is not a
perfect process it has its shortcomings but
it's there And we have to learn how to work
with it and hopefully not lose sight that we have
to improve it not tear it down but to make it

work for us And I learned very early in my political life how I learned the rules and I've learned how to make it work for the things that I feel have to be done whether it's redistricting whether it's you know a thing like bilingual contracts whether it is opening up the medical schools

You know I went to a conference I spoke at a conference Saturday man There were about 150 men and women there--all Chicanos A hundred and thirty or forty of them were doctors Man I mean I started tearing down the walls of medical schools in 1973 and a lot of the doctors there were the beneficiaries of a lot of that work Man it was a great feeling Man it was a mindblower! And I told them the story I told them I says You know I learned one thing about medical schools and universities in general anything that threatens monuments to themselves They'll do anything to get those monuments And I learned that So, whenever I decided to go attack a medical school for their lack of a policy of inclusion of Chicanos I learned to do it by threatening one

of their monuments I did it with the UC Davis medical school when I wiped out their agricultural extension program monument building They couldn't come up they felt They couldn't do anything to get more Chicanos They said they were doing everything I said Fine When you come back to me with a plan then we'll talk about your building " It was a \$120 million building Shit a week later man

VASQUEZ They had a plan

ALATORRE [Laughter] Oh they had a plan When UC San Diego had a medical library that they needed--it was a lily-white medical school--I wiped out their medical school library They developed a plan And it still is operating today The first one I did was the teaching hospital at UC Irvine And for that I extracted a commitment that 25 percent of their medical school admissions were to be ethnic minorities--Chicanos and blacks To this day they have the best record of access to Chicano doctors in the entire state So you know you learn that So to me, hey yeah that was I mean man they put more "How could you do that? And it's

needed" and everything Fine You have a need
I have a need You take care of my need I'll
help you with your need Now that may be
looked upon as being wrong I don't think that
it's wrong I mean it's amazing when you
threaten one of their monuments the ability of
schools When I did that to Newman Justice
Newman when he was the dean of the law school at
Boalt Hall when he said that it was
intellectually dishonest to have a program that
favored a particular ethnic group and there was
no way that he could establish an affirmative
action program or a program to provide access to
the law school When he said that on the
one hand we defunded We funded the law
school and defunded the administration And in a
week he had a program And Willie Brown and I
were the ones that did it And Willie Brown and
I spoke at the graduation of the first class that
was a beneficiary of the program they
established Man we never saw so many Chicanos
blacks women graduating from the law school
These were the people that he said that you
know it was unfair to allow them in if they were

destined to failure So we reminded Justice Newman at the law school graduation that people that were graduating that day were the ones that he felt it was unfair to allow them access because they were going to fail They didn't fail

VASQUEZ Tell me the Democratic party is that the vehicle for the Mexican-American community?

ALATORRE You know there's no ve I mean you know yeah I mean I'm a Democrat but I'm not in love with the Democratic party The Democratic party Look it it's power Nobody gives up power power has to be taken The Democratic party as no other party or no other entity that has power is going to give it up because it's the right thing to do I mean how do you go to a person that has a dollar and tell him Hey can I have your dollar? Because hey you know it's only right that I have it because I deserve it"? You're not going to get anything You're a damn fool So you have to take it away And power's the same way It just so happens that the Democratic party holds more promise on the issues and has a record that is far superior to

the Republican party as it relates to certain issues that affect Chicanos Most of the issues But they're not perfect I mean they have been as much of a problem to Chicanos as any other entity has But see they only respect one thing and they respect power The power of the vote And we have the potential that hasn't really been met But they fear us And rightfully so

VASQUEZ I can understand you being optimistic about the record It's the potential given the floundering that you're seeing nowadays and have seen for the last decade almost I don't see the present leadership of the party for example at the state or national level

ALATORRE Well we have to Yes of course But then you know what? Is that we don't have to be dependent on that leadership We have to be able to threaten and to carry out the threat That's the only way that you get things done And see our needs to a great degree--and this is what I learned being a member of the city council--when you really get down to what are the needs of our community and are those needs going to be met at

the national level or at the state level or at the local level And it's at the local level where the basics the basic needs of people can be met I mean it's mind-boggling man I represented this community for almost fourteen years in the legislature So you figure in fourteen years you know where people's heads are at and everything else And I'll tell you something it was a rude awakening to run and win as a city councilman and really learn to understand what the real needs are of people And they aren't at the level of the abstract nature of what happens in Sacramento Because that's just so far removed It's kind of like we're at the level of day-to-day survival And the issue of whether my community streets are going to be swept whether police are going to

[End Tape 9 Side A]

[Begin Tape 9 Side B]

ALATORRE whether services of different governmental entities are going to do their job as it relates to our community Those things have to be dealt with And they can best be dealt with at the local level Once that we can get those to work

for our community then we can take the next step And then that's where another level of government comes into play Not to say that none of the others are important because they are But until we can get government to work at the local level you know it's fine And we have to continue to elect more Chicanos at all levels we've got to get them to work And then we can take it to the next step But man it still blows me away I mean I go to community meetings--this is after three four years and I've been working on these things that you know I think are really important You go back man and you go to a meeting and you listen to where people are coming from Man it's so far removed from what you thought and the things you're working on It brings you back to reality man

VASQUEZ Which has been the most satisfying for you so far? Or is it fair to compare?

ALATORRE City council

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE More immediate gratification

VASQUEZ More immediate results and actions you think?

ALATORRE Sure You can see it Because you're here I

mean I did a lot of things in Sacramento Some of them are the best-kept secrets

VASQUEZ Hopefully this interview will help to remedy that

ALATORRE Yeah

VASQUEZ Let me ask you one more question before we end Your narrative is so far peppered with them but maybe you want to close with a particular or a number of particular lessons But what lessons did you learn in politics so far in a quarter of a century?

ALATORRE Let's see Well you know

VASQUEZ I'll narrow that down About the political process

ALATORRE Oh okay let's see What have I learned? I learned how to count And if you don't know how to count you'll never be successful in this business Fortunately I learned very early that the number forty-one was magical in the assembly and twenty-one was magical in the senate And anywhere from seven to eleven was magical in committees I learned from the old-style politician the meaning of your word as an elected representative but more importantly as a man

I've learned that the enemy is from within not from without I've learned that many times the quote 'liberal' politician is the greatest impediment and the real enemy many times of our community and the best friend is the racist because he's honest I'm an optimist man You know I believe very strongly in the institutions that I've worked in--with all of their imperfections And give me a Chicano no matter whether I like that person or not and collectively we can make a difference Those are a few of the things

[End Tape 9 Side B]

[Session 9 July 13 1990]

[Begin Tape 10 Side A]

VASQUEZ Councilman, in this additional session I want to go back over some topics that we've discussed before And now based on other interviews that I've done with other participants [some specific political] processes are going to be up for discussion One has to do with the 1981 reapportionment I've had an opportunity to talk to most of the principal actors in Californios for Fair Representation And from those interviews and those discussions I've gotten their perspective on your role in that reapportionment Address for me if you will an answer to the following question Why was it that having such an astute member of the assembly and an experienced member of the assembly who had the ear and the confidence of the speaker in a Democratic-controlled body--or at least a majority-Democratic body--why was it in your

estimation that you and Californios were not able to develop a closer and a more productive working relationship?

ALATORRE First of all you have to understand I had a responsibility to fashion a reapportionment plan that took not only into consideration the question of Hispanic representation but also I had to try and reconcile that with control of the legislature by the Democratic party A plan for which I could get a sufficient number of votes to get it passed And to not only look at it from the standpoint of 1982 but we're talking about an entire decade That is attempting to ensure the [Democratic] majority throughout the decade of the 1980s

What fascinated me is that from the very beginning when I met with the Californios I think it was one of the first meetings that they had at Cal State L A I basically explained to them the process I made a commitment that whatever came about was certainly going to be better than had ever been done as far as redistricting was concerned

VASQUEZ For who?

ALATORRE For Chicanos And obviously I told them that I was a [Democratic] partisan So I was going to be good for Democrats You have to look at the makeup of Californios And it's fascinating what happens almost every decade A certain number of people come out of the woodwork and attempt to control or to disrupt a process I absolutely believe that the Californios were interested in attempting to come up with not only a plan that would help Chicanos but they were willing to play in the process There were people there that didn't trust the process and they criticized the process I went there not to apologize for it because I accepted and I [acknowledged] that it was an unfair process

 The problem with Californios was that they were always looking at whatever they came up with strictly from a regional perspective See I couldn't They only looked at Southern California Well that has no relationship [to my perspective] because I had to start from the top of the state and work my way down

 So many of the premises that they had were not valid premises because they could not

fashion something that looked at the whole state to see if what they were coming up with made sense. It made sense so long as they looked at it from a regional perspective. But it didn't make sense because there were a variety of factors that played into it. And I told them that " I told them that from the very beginning. And you have got to be, you know, organized. And you have to make sure that you don't get caught. And I told them, I said, "Look, you obviously have a right to utilize whatever resources that you want. The Rose Institute of State and Local Government is the absolute. Their purpose is to destroy the Democratic party. So if you choose to do that, then automatically what is going to happen is that we're going to have a severed relationship. And we don't need to do that. So then they accepted that. This was, I think, the first genuine [effort] on the part of Chicanos. And I told them, You have to organize. You have to put pressure. I can't do it all by myself. You know, drop the process. Whether it was in San Jose or whether it was in Fresno or whether it

was in Los Angeles or in San Diego I worked with offshoots of the Californios If I am to analyze who was the most effective in what area it was probably San Jose

VASQUEZ Who specifically?

ALATORRE [Peter] Pete Carrillo was kind of like the chairman of whatever it was He understood the process He understood that he couldn't come up with something just looking at it from [the perspective of] Santa Clara County And the things that he--that they--recommended were incorporated into the redistricting plan The same thing went on in Fresno Obviously Los Angeles was going to be problematic But the commitment to create a Chicano seat in Congress you know was made And it was done long before we even started Because when I met with the California [congressional] delegation and Phil Burton I told them You start from this perspective There will be a new Chicano seat in Los Angeles I don't give a damn where it is If you don't do that you don't have a redistricting "

VASQUEZ So Phil Burton was committed to that even before

the whole Californios business started?

ALATORRE Oh absolutely I mean he was committed because he knew that he didn't have a choice He was a realist

VASQUEZ Were you sure this just would come through and that he [Burton] had even talked to someone from Californios on an individual basis?

ALATORRE Uh-huh

VASQUEZ And had already made that commitment?

ALATORRE Uh-huh

VASQUEZ Tell me [were] reservations or doubts expressed to you from Democratic leadership about Californios because of their connections or their use of the computing facilities at the Rose Institute of State and Local Government?

ALATORRE Oh sure I think that there was obviously suspicion Willie [Brown] said You know I don't mind working with your people but they can't be working my best interest [in mind] And the Rose Institute of State and Local Government is there to destroy the Democratic party ' But putting that aside you have to understand that it was a black speaker who had appointed a Chicano to head redistricting And the only

issue on redistricting was Chicano representation. The one thing I will say is that Chicanos were better organized than any other group who worked in the process. I say better, but it's all relative. Right? I think they learned throughout the process. But from the beginning to when it ended, a lot of different players started to come into the fold. What you had initially and what you ended up with was a different Californios because of the people

VASQUEZ Explain that to me.

ALATORRE Some people were basically bent on accomplishing nothing.

VASQUEZ Like?

ALATORRE Raul Ruiz and several people like him that basically were the perpetual criers. That it's a 'corrupt system.' That The Democratic party has screwed Chicanos. That Nothing is going to happen and we have to take more aggressive measures to try and get our best interest [served]. What's funny about that is that I was from their school [of thought]. I mean, if anything, I had to contend with eighty members of the legislature that didn't trust me. And even

amongst my colleagues on the Democratic side you don't think that they were nervous about me because I'm a Chicano? The only issue was Chicanos and how you're going to screw me I had to massage that So I had it in there and I even had it initially with Willie Willie trusted me and everything else but he was wondering whether we could pull it off

VASQUEZ Was he unsure of what effect Californios might have on you?

ALATORRE No no no He never had He never questioned my loyalty or anything

VASQUEZ What was his concern?

ALATORRE He was concerned with whether we had the expertise to develop it and put it together And [because] I was so secretive I didn't tell him shit I mean he asked me Would you like to have a fight? Fuck you You don't have to know And I would just take off People Members were complaining to him that they weren't getting information He said Oh fuck He doesn't give me any information He's crazy But we played it I told him I said Unless you give me full control and allow me to

do what I have to do man I don't need it Tell me what the parameters are--what needs to be done What is your thing?" And he said

Blacks I said "Cool I'll take care of that What else?" He said I want to keep control I said All right That's fine "

VASQUEZ Were there conflicts with or concerns amongst black elected officials because of Californios's vociferous approach? And who were those people?

ALATORRE You know at the end of the process they sat in at Willie Brown's office

VASQUEZ Right

ALATORRE And they sat in the day of the vote in my office here in L A Obviously [Senator] Maxine [Waters] was really pissed off because she had worked with some people from Californios They couldn't even articulate what they had a problem with Because they testified that they supported the assembly plan and that they supported the congressional plan It's in the public record John [E] Huerta was there for MALDEF and for the Californios So depending on who you talked to in the Californios determined the extent of the conflict that I actually had

VASQUEZ There was a variation?

ALATORRE Oh sure

VASQUEZ There was a variation Was that evident at the
 time that there wasn't a unified ?

ALATORRE And that was the tragedy They looked like fools
 some of the times Because they would be saying
 one thing and then they would be doing something
 else Was it [reapportionment] harmed? No It
 wasn't harmed because evidently it was going to
 happen And no matter how much they fucked up
 it wasn't going to make a difference in what
 ultimately had to come out I knew what I had to
 do

VASQUEZ Is that what some of the Californios interpreted
 as your secretiveness and aloofness from their
 concerns?

ALATORRE Well if the legislators who I had to be
 accountable to felt that you can imagine what
 they felt But throughout the process I would
 give them information Not information about
 what I was doing But when they sought things I
 would provide it for them And that was all I
 could do What else did they want me to do? And
 it was a very difficult line to walk I don't

really believe that I had a bad relationship

VASQUEZ I asked you these questions because there's a variation of opinions among a number of people that were involved in Californios

ALATORRE Uh-huh

VASQUEZ Now in evaluating the effectiveness tell me what do you think was the greatest accomplishment of Californios in that whole effort?

ALATORRE They [often] spoke as one voice even though they had different agendas--depending on the geographic area And Chicanos by and large in Californios obviously were the empowered group They probably were the most effective and the most articulate in expressing their points of view The legislators didn't want to hear it But they did it very well Their only difficulty was that they weren't computerized sufficiently so that they could fashion a statewide plan rather than a regional plan depending on geographic area that we were talking about in Los Angeles or in California That was their [greatest] shortcoming That hopefully is going to be overcome this time around I attended a conference several months ago at Loyola Marymount

[University] And I told them Reapportionment started the day after the plan was signed into law And if we're going to be effective we are going to have to speak with one voice We're going to have to have computer capabilities We're going to have to have the people who can put the data together along with the political sophistication to sell whatever point of view [emerges] And having the hammer of the court on your side I used that throughout the 1981 redistricting " I told them "I can't do this I said I got the Voting Rights Act problem

VASQUEZ Which was what?

ALATORRE Which was not violating the political aspirations of ethnic and racial minorities by dividing them or splitting them up in a way that diminishes their participation in the whole process And I used that It was a bullshit because they were not sophisticated enough to start filing lawsuits I just used that as a threat as to what I was unwilling to do I said Do you want to jeopardize the plan?" Some people didn't care So I would just go to the issue on the

town Hey I can't do this You want a plan to be jeopardized because of this guy's selfishness? You see I was either able to bully them and convince them they had to do it or when they were just not reasonable I would just do a circle around them I would get all the legislators that were in the adjoining areas to buy off what it was they wanted even if I had to sacrifice the good stuff for this guy Because he was not in the vote I wouldn't jeopardize him politically but I would give away things that person wanted because I basically wrote off his vote

VASQUEZ Do you feel that Californios did not use the courts effectively? For example the case in the county of Los Angeles Perhaps a legal challenge might have precluded the need to have what's going on now?

ALATORRE Oh absolutely But here again I think it --the organization--was in its embryonic stages You couldn't have expected one organization to be the lawyers the political scientists demographers and the like What was lacking was once that things happened and they

were not challenged they spent a lot of time with the state I know that they spent some time with the city and the county but I don't believe that they were as forceful and as articulate in their presentations at the city and the county level as I believe they were at the state level They were much more forceful--more numbers When it got time to the county and the city Not that they didn't spend a lot of a time they did but it wasn't as intense as it probably was at the state level

VASQUEZ Apart from the limitations on technical capabilities what were the political shortcomings of the Californios's effort in 1981 as you see it?

ALATORRE The inability to reach consensus

VASQUEZ Amongst themselves?

ALATORRE Amongst themselves You know whoever you talked to Many times there was opposition I had good relationships with the ones I could work with Obviously [with] John Huerta who was very very intimately involved Even with Santillán who was involved It was interesting when they testified Santillan had to admit--

even if he didn't like to admit that--that more could have happened but it was better than any redistricting plan that had been drafted up to then John Huerta the same thing And [better] than he would have by the group sitting in at Willie Brown's office or at my office It was like "What are you guys talking about? You were up here Basically we showed you what it [the plan] was What could and couldn't happen And now you're sitting in thinking that that's going to have an impact on the deliberations? I already had the votes

ALATORRE So it had no impact the sit-ins?

VASQUEZ No no If anything it aggravated Willie And yes it obviously pissed me off Because it was not the most responsible people Why is it that they spent so much time with me when the senate screwed them? And they didn't spend it there? I told them from the beginning You can't trust [Senator Daniel E] Boatwright He will listen to you carefully because he will lie to you He will say that he's going to do things and he will screw you And he did it He did it Everything that I said he was going to do Maybe

it's because I was an easier target that they concentrated all their efforts on me rather than on the body that really screwed up. Because their Chicano district was in Orange County. It made no sense. Absolutely no sense. And I told them it was going to happen.

VASQUEZ: What is your estimation of Senator Bill Greene's role in all of this? He was less than open to their testimony when they appeared before the senate.

ALATORRE: Yes. Because see, I guess they were much more hostile. And he didn't have a good feeling about what their real objective was. Because yes, obviously he was going to protect his interest. And I think he took it as, "You guys want to go after us blacks."

VASQUEZ: They did want to collapse part of some black districts?

ALATORRE: Oh sure. Exactly. And of course you're going to [get] that kind of a reaction. It's funny to come up with the ideal if everything is under ideal circumstances. Many times they lacked the political sophistication to understand what was doable and what wasn't. Instead of getting

people who naturally would help sometimes they ended up alienating their natural allies

VASQUEZ Can you think of an example?

ALATORRE Well I think that Bill is one of who was concerned On our side obviously Vasco [John Vasconcellos] I mean you know he almost died Because he knew he was one of [those who] could be hurt by it [Californios] I think that some of the blacks were comfortable with me That I wasn't going to get into an ethnic fight It wasn't the time It wasn't the time in '81 because I could have but it wouldn't have meant anything We [Chicanos] had numbers but we didn't have the ability to register voters And both South Central and southeast Los Angeles I think has changed Not dramatically enough, but it is changing And we will be the force in San Jose

VASQUEZ Let's talk about the 1991 reapportionment Did the '81 effort lay a foundation that will make in your estimation the '91 reapportionment more productive for Hispanics?

ALATORRE I think it's going to depend [on] who does it I don't have any confidence that the senate is

going to do a good [job] I think it's going to depend on who does it on the assembly side Frank del Olmo interestingly enough paid me a good compliment He spoke at this seminar at the Harvard School of Politics reception here in Los Angeles He was one of the speakers He gave me accolades for what I was able to do and the skill with which I was able to do it And then he said That [Alatorre's presence]'s not going to be there in 1990

VASQUEZ So is another Californios-type effort necessary?

ALATORRE Oh absolutely Probably even more so More so And it's only because you can't trust Democrats or Republicans to do the right thing See there are several ways of going about it One is how well you organize How well you can deliver on the things you say you want to deliver Making a politically sophisticated argument Like I told them If all you're going to do is go out and start blasting all the legislators for racism and everything else and then on the other hand try to get their support for what you want You have to be politically sophisticated You have to have your

allies on the inside you have to do the work on the outside so that it makes it easier hopefully to get some of these things done

VASQUEZ Was that one of the problems in 1981? That there was not enough confidence and enough sophistication to be able to have both an insider and an outsider game plan?

ALATORRE It probably would rank as a C 'C+' maybe at best From the outside But see it didn't matter for me because I was going to do it anyway I knew what was possible And I knew what wasn't So you know they helped me because I just used them to say They are crazy But see all the more reason why we can't afford to screw over them because they will file a lawsuit '

VASQUEZ When?

ALATORRE This time around See then it was just an idle threat I believe it to be real this time around

VASQUEZ Because of?

ALATORRE Because of the county plan and the Department of Justice suit against the city If it holds I mean the county especially I believe it sent

ripples throughout the country because of the implications of it [the suit] And it basically says to legislative bodies "Hey you know the old boy network--the way you've done your business before--cannot be tolerated because this can happen again If it happened in the most powerful county in the entire country it can happen anywhere So from that standpoint I think we're going to be better off I think we have a greater possibility of a threat of using the courts--more so than the threat of demonstrations or everything else See if it's played right you have to establish a rapport and credibility with whoever it is that's going to be doing the redistricting plan

You have to be smart enough to know what is possible and what isn't You can't expect as an example the speaker to say I'm going to jeopardize one of my incumbents to do the right thing But where there is room to do it You have to be very calculating as to where your objectives are and where you're going to take your stance Probably it has to be Santa Clara County because I think there has been enough

growth there for Chicanos I think it can be Fresno The best you can do in southeast Los Angeles and South Central Los Angeles is to not fracture the potential of Chicanos by spreading it [the vote] out so that they're never a threat to the blacks That's where the confrontation is going to be In the south And there's [Assemblywoman] Sally Tanner To me she's dead meat if it's done correctly So you have to be realistic as to what your objectives are And that's what you have to hammer on

VASQUEZ Do you think that the speaker who is the same speaker will be more sensitive to the need to deal with Latinos early on?

ALATORRE I think you're sensitive to the extent that if they make the same mistake as last time he's not going to have somebody going to be constantly picking at him Somebody that he can trust to do whatever has to be done Al Lou's going to do it I don't trust too many people The ideal person for me would be John Burton I mean he would be the ideal because you could work with him And he has the confidence of the speaker The other one is [Assemblyman Phillip]

Phil Isenberg who's technically sharp and everything But he doesn't have the natural, gut feeling for ethnic and racial minorities Yes he's a liberal and he can philosophize But when it comes down to the nut-cutting you know he's like most liberals He can't be trusted

VASQUEZ Let's talk a little about the county plan here in Los Angeles Give me your impressions how the board of supervisors has handled the lawsuit and the actions of Judge David [V] Kenyon

ALATORRE Oh I think that it's been miserable They have been arrogant They have been obstructionists And because I've had some interaction with some of the members I can understand why because basically they've lost sight of reality First there's the ideological issue And then there's the issue that We're holier than thou And we're big We're the county And we didn't do anything wrong ' They know what they did There's no doubt about it And they continued to demonstrate their arrogance by their actions even after the lawsuit was filed The way that they conducted themselves and the opportunity that the judge gave them to see if there was some kind of

a solution to it and their basically saying To hell with you judge " Attacking the judge the way that they have That was stupid Then to add insult to injury to introduce the plan that they did In their minds they thought that it was okay because they accomplished what the judge wanted They used the county charter which basically says that you have to have an incumbent in that person's district If it's the third district that you pick you have to have the incumbent in there however you get to it Rather than do what they should have done they decided to go after [Los Angeles County Supervisor Edmund D] Edelman And by doing that they came up with this abomination of a district And still today they don't know what they're doing Some of them think that they're going to win in court That the judge is totally wrong And as I've told some of the members of the board of supervisors Your unwillingness to make the tough decision And there's only two decisions to make One is the first district and I'm sorry sir but the bigger interest of the county is at stake And that is my

particular point Or the expansion One of them I thought that that wasn't even a negotiable issue That's not necessarily true

VASQUEZ So what? Are these people being led so blindly by their ideological predilections that they can't be practical?

ALATORRE There is no leadership

VASQUEZ Is that it?

ALATORRE There basically is no leadership Nobody can put three votes together You have [Los Angeles County Supervisor] Deane Dana that got so burned the last time around--only to capitulate to the pressure And he's totally unwilling to do anything The loose cannon is [Los Angeles County Supervisor Peter F] Pete Schabarum But Pete Schabarum is just out in left field somewhere And he's just laughing at all of them So consequently you just can't get three people to come together Although there is I believe the will They want seven At least four of them want seven districts

VASQUEZ They want to expand the board?

ALATORRE They want to expand it because they know that's the only way to possibly resolve the issue and

minimize the damage to each of the incumbent members of the board But there isn't the will and the person to make it all happen

VASQUEZ One of their arguments against expanding the board to seven or nine--let's just say seven--would cause chaos in the organization of services at the county level

ALATORRE That's just not the case at all Of course not Whoever uses that argument just doesn't live in reality The fact of the matter is the county is large [Each supervisorial district] has 1 7 million people How can you effectively represent 1 7 million people? The real issue is not wanting to relinquish whatever power they have now and have it diluted I think that's what the real issue [is]

VASQUEZ One of the upshots of the plan that they did present was to throw the black community in with the Beverly Hills community and in the process further disenfranchising blacks

ALATORRE That just goes to show you how arrogant and stupid they were Because they didn't even realize they did that The reason they chose Edelman's district was because they didn't want

to touch [Los Angeles County Supervisor Kenneth] Kenny Hahn But you see there's a ripple effect when you dump stuff off on Edelman to pick up whatever it is that you want to get to And they don't see further [than that] They don't even realize the political jeopardy they've put themselves in Antonovich I think is living in space somewhere because if that plan were to hold he's going to be representing some of the liberal Jewish areas in the San Fernando Valley that he has no relationship [with] all in an effort to keep the ideological balance [majority] of the board They are blinded to anything else They didn't think they did anything wrong to Kenny Hahn Just like they didn't think they did anything wrong in the creation of the Hispanic district Well you got you what you wanted Yes But the reason we have to do that is we had to keep Edelman in the Third District and pick up the south

VASQUEZ One of the interesting things that came out of this of course was the resignation of Pete Schabarum and the special election in his district You had a Chicana win--Sarah Flores

What does that mean? Why did she win?

ALATORRE She had the money And she spent eighteen years in that district And she was able to [launch] a very credible campaign In a primary like the one she went through she had a natural built-in constituency

VASQUEZ Schabarum's?

ALATORRE Schabarum And it was Hispanic too That was one thing But she was also able to transcend others because she was the most established candidate It's in court You can't take away from the fact that she was able to put together a very impressive list of endorsements And she was out there for eighteen years What happens in a general [election] I think is another thing I think then the racism will come up because that is not a district where Even though she's a Republican and she has knowledge and everything and she is a non-threatening person--she's nice and everything else--you still have polarized votes It wasn't manifested so much in the first go-around as much as I think it is going to be if there is an election in the same district Which I doubt there will be

VASQUEZ You are one of the persons who has been mentioned most often as a potential or possible candidate to run for the board of supervisors. Do you want to discuss your plans and what you think you could accomplish there? Why would you leave the city council?

ALATORRE I think depending on what the final outcome is of the lawsuit and the timing--if there is and if it's upheld and the like--yes sure I have an interest. My interest is very basic. I look at what my assets and liabilities are. I thrive in a legislative arena. I can work with people. I know that politics is the art of compromise. But because it is that art you don't have to compromise your principles. If you have an ability to try and reach consensus you know I think you could be very effective. And I'm not interested solely because of the power that it has but that is obviously an aspect to it. But we [Chicanos]'ve never had representation on that board. It gets down to a question of emphasis. It's not that Ed Edelman has been a bad supervisor for Chicanos. It isn't that Debs--Ernie Debs--was a bad guy for Chicanos. But his

emphasis was somewhere else So consequently it was either the [Los Angeles City Councilman Arthur K] Art Snyder syndrome where you put up monuments [to yourself] and you do certain things while the infrastructure and the guts of it [the district] all is falling apart But if you can show you've done these things and you're somewhat visible you're going to be okay Chicanos are very loyal people Probably the biggest percentage of the vote that he gets happens to be in the Chicano areas

VASQUEZ Edelman?

ALATORRE Edelman sure Same thing with Ernie Debs He did the same thing But there are so many other things you know When it comes down to the hard decisions about closing health-care centers closing services they're going to go to where their constituency is And that's going to be their emphasis--not an emphasis on Chicanos Their concern is not what the halls of county government look like Yes they're for access for Chicanos but they're not going to kill themselves to do it And when it's all said and done administrators and heads of agencies know

They know what Ed Edelman has to do But when it comes down to choices they know where he's going to [end up] And that's what I think has to be changed

VASQUEZ If you were to list the three most pressing problems that need to be addressed at the county level in Los Angeles County and you were to try and do that as a member of the board of supervisors what would those three things be?

ALATORRE I think the main thing is the delivery of the services that the county provides and an emphasis on it Because we can talk about the esoteric issues in a bigger arena about what's in the best interest of the people But what's the best interest of the people from their standpoint is how the county responds to my needs Whether the county is a friend or a foe And whether I'm going to be treated in the same way as a person living in an affluent area That's really what the issue is And you accomplish it by

[End Tape 10 Side A]

[Begin Tape 10 Side B]

ALATORRE those things happening And that is the actual presence of Chicanos at all levels of

government When it has come down to that issue it's been played off very interestingly It's been played off as black versus Chicano And then you don't have to do very much because there's a conflict And you allow that conflict to continue and perpetuate itself So that the people who should be moved up the ladder or into the jobs that Chicanos should have is not accomplished

VASQUEZ Do you foresee a potential conflict between blacks and Chicanos ?

ALATORRE Sure There is one right now

VASQUEZ Tell me about that

ALATORRE It's basically a parody It's a question of numbers--relative numbers--in the work force of the county of Los Angeles Underrepresentation is one issue but it is middle management and above where the bigger problem lies The reason blacks have done so well is they came up in the county They have a long history of civil service We have Chicanos in civil service that have been there for a long time but it's not the Chicanos who have risen and have really blossomed and developed in that system We're a new

phenomena We have better-educated people and people that have the credentials to take some of these positions but because we're so new in that system we have not penetrated the upper echelons of that system And there hasn't been that voice either through force or through cajoling and the like so that the departments have to change the way they do their business And that's what it is It's amazing what impact a person can have by just being physically present on how people do their business Because they realize Gee I can't do the same thing I did before

VASQUEZ Even if it's only at the level of perception?

ALATORRE That's right Exactly

VASQUEZ Tell me the role that you see that a group like the Chicano County Employees Association has played in that vacuum you talk about

ALATORRE I think they played differently depending on the leadership Some of them have been so concerned for their own [jobs] that they will go only so far Others have been very vocal but haven't been able to put it together They haven't combined the need to be forceful and the political savvy to make whatever it is they want

to happen happen The other thing is there obviously hasn't been somebody that they can relate to in a position of influence to make the things that they've been talking about happen That's the main thing

VASQUEZ This may be a good place to ask this Constantly in the press and even in discussions among some of the political leadership in the city there is a dichotomy that is projected Sometimes you are associated with one side and Councilwoman Gloria Molina with the other And that is a dichotomy between the politics of 'the political deal and the politics of "consensus and accountability Is there such a dichotomy?

ALATORRE Well consensus leads to something happening And see I look at that as being what I probably am the best at And that also is thrown out as being deal-making You know I didn't make the rules I learned how things happened So I've learned how to deal in that arena Now that has been viewed in the negative At least where I'm coming from a long time ago you could yell you can shout and you can complain But if you can't get anything done of what use are you to

the people or the causes you are trying to articulate? How do you get things through that process? And it's true many times you work through the political arena of counting votes to the unorthodox way of having it done from within --administratively But whatever it takes you've got to learn how to do it to get it done And the idea of consensus By whom? If it's only consensus by those that you are trying to get something done for but you don't get it done of what use is it? Consensus to me means that you are able to arrive at a common ground to move toward the resolution of a particular problem

VASQUEZ Including your opposition?

ALATORRE Absolutely Sure I mean that's the most effective way of bringing about change You know for so long we have been conditioned to losing And there are people that are so conditioned that way and are so pessimistic that they really don't want to see the things done that they claim they want done Because then they won't have a forum to continue to agitate and blame

I am more interested in how you get something done because I believe that in order to change things you've got to get things done. You can't just be an advocate and a forceful presenter of ideas without being able to seek a resolution and come to some closure on things. And many times people confuse the ability of somebody to get some of these things done as being a deal-maker versus those that maybe are very effective advocates that can't take it to the next step. I played that game when I started. You can only lose so many times and wonder. What is it that I'm doing wrong? And this is something that I believe very strongly. You don't have to prostitute your beliefs and your basic philosophical commitments to accomplish something. So long as you know what it is that is your bottom line and you never confuse that bottom line then however you [accomplish] whatever it is that you're doing is fine.

VASQUEZ Does this pragmatic approach to getting things done and being able to reach some consensus with your opposition through compromise work at the

expense of accountability to your constituency?

ALATORRE I don't believe so If you are getting things done for segments of your constituency, and they are going to be the beneficiaries of it then how can you be prostituting or how can you be sacrificing the people that allegedly you represent? You can't get it done when you are being a disservice to the people that you happen to represent

VASQUEZ Is that kind of getting things done or bringing home the bacon as it were your idea of leadership?

ALATORRE My idea of leadership is the ability to translate the needs, wishes and aspirations of the people you happen to represent Translate them to some positive conclusion Deal-making is just part of the process Deal-making I think is the wrong word because it has a negative connotation I look at it as consensus See in consensus you can't be one-sided You can have consensus among people as to what it is that they want without having to accomplish what it is that they want And sometimes it's a gradual process Sometimes it doesn't just happen But if you can steer the

course and move forward toward your ultimate objective that to me is what this process is really all about That I guess differentiates the effective political person with the ineffective But many times people are caught up with style and saying the right thing Saying what it is that people want to hear But never being truly accountable in terms of accomplishments People are so mesmerized by that many times that they are unable to critically evaluate what it is that person has done Style many times is what people are captivated by Not effectiveness or the ability to accomplish

VASQUEZ Do you think this is perhaps part of the problem or part of the reason there's so much disaffection and discontent with elected officials today?

ALATORRE What it is is that we're living in a time in history when we are more self-motivated and only interested in how anything benefits me or affects me negatively than being able to look at the bigger picture As an example take the district I represent I represent some areas that are only concerned with their ability to live from

day-to-day And wanting the same things that maybe a more affluent area [has] And that is a better way of life for their children and everything else Their needs and how you accomplish those are totally different And it's very frustrating because the very people whom you're attempting to help are many times so cynical and so burnt out by inaction that they're your biggest critics It gets back to 'You're damned if you do you're damned if you don't '

People complain about Why is that people who live over here have a prettier community than people who live over here? When you try and bring about improvements Why you're trying to move us out of Chávez Ravine ' When you're trying to improve the delivery of services for children--and that means having places to congregate and to play outside of the street--then people will say That's only going to attract the wrong element into our neighborhood You know the critical need for [low-cost] housing Basically people do not want it in their backyard And I guess the worst and the most hurtful part is that it's our

own doing it to our own It's like I just
crossed the tracks and I want to make sure that
the people on that side don't come and live on
this side of the tracks until they're like me
[Interruption]

You know that's what I'm seeing now We hear
about NIMBY You know "not in my backyard
And see before it was white people talking
about us Now we're doing it against
ourselves I'm not interested in destroying
neighborhoods or anything else I want to try
and resurrect some neighborhoods People have
either got to be part of the solution or continue
to be part of the problem But in trying to get
them to understand that they have to be part of
the solution they will then complain 'Well do
it somewhere else " It's very easy to complain

VASQUEZ

It's very interesting councilman that moving
around city hall one picks up a pretty common
belief or consensus that you're probably one of
the most effective--if not the most effective--
member on the council both for your district and
for citywide issues and yet in tomorrow's paper,
we will read that there is a recall [against you]

movement in your district Tell me the dynamics of that

ALATORRE Some of it is self-promotion And see it's really easy It really started as a result of a project that was being contemplated in an area where the people basically wanted nothing They don't want certain elements to move into their neighborhood and the like But it's part of a bigger issue And that is people are afraid of change They are suspect of that They're afraid Before it was in changing [white] communities But now we're even seeing it in our own community Who is it that's going to be coming into that community but [our own]? So it becomes a class issue And that's how it started And people are genuinely frustrated by problems in their community They believe that it's somebody else's problem to solve See government can do so much But people have to also do it in conjunction with government The lies and distortions about what it is I've done and what it is I haven't done you know play real well Couple that with people's perception that all I'm interested in is power for myself

and that I'm nonresponsive [and it] can fuel something But that's just one geographic area

VASQUEZ Within the district?

ALATORRE Within the district And you know I'm not afraid of it It's just a cruel hoax on the people for somebody else's agenda

VASQUEZ Whose in this case?

ALATORRE Oh I think it's this young kid by the name of Richard Saldivar who's a frustrated politician Never accomplished much Has had a hard time holding a job He was a field deputy for a former city councilman Art Snyder And he just fuels things You know people can be manipulated and used without looking at what is it that I've done or what is it I haven't done I guess the bad part of it is that I know I care more about the area and the people I represent than probably anybody else has It's just a natural thing And yes I wish I could do more There are limits to what you can do And the frustrating thing is that many times people are not logical They just react to emotions

VASQUEZ In this district I think there were three recall

efforts against your predecessor Is there something about the district or about the similarity in your leadership styles?

ALATORRE No Because at first it was He's white and we need Mexican representation And he made some major mistakes They tried to do something to capitalize on that Ultimately none of them were successful Because what happens in a situation like this is that you're really forced into polarizing people You know what do these crazies want? So you go to another area and they don't because this one thing And they claim that I haven't done X-Y-Z and here's the record Then they're going to say "Well you know what it is And then you just turn around and say This guy wants to run? Why are they using the taxpayers' money? If the person wants to let him run It's only next year But they want to go through a recall Supposedly because I don't care about the community Under the guise of caring about the community and We need it now There are built-in issues It's the money issue It's going to cost you all this money for what? Here is my record You may

disagree with me but here's the record What is it that I've done wrong I haven't raped a kid or anything It is somebody that is complaining about a certain thing that I have no control over

VASQUEZ What is that certain thing that you have no control over?

ALATORRE Over the fact that people by right have an ability to develop their properties--property rights And see it's hard to tell a person that because they believe I can stop anything Well people have certain rights okay? There are some projects that yes I can stop Especially if they need you know variances and the like But they can't differentiate between projects that I've ever had control over versus those that have just come up and been built Because of the land and the proximity to downtown Los Angeles there's been more development There's no doubt about that That is not all bad Some of it has been bad So I try to correct this So I introduce an interim controller You can't build anything more than a duplex or a single-family dwelling And if you

want to do multifamily dwelling you've got to go through a process of accountability Even that's instituted and still people don't understand That they still say no

Then they're frustrated about crime Everybody's frustrated by crime What some people don't even understand is that their very kids are the ones causing the crime They don't want to acknowledge that their own kids are in gangs or that their kids are selling dope They just think that we should stop it

VASQUEZ [They believe] the folks from the projects are doing it all

ALATORRE Folks from the projects And it's not It's the good kids that are doing it The gang-bangers that are doing it And for a long time they just had blinders on 'No it's not happening here ' Well it's here and it's our very own kids We are the ones that develop bad habits It's not somebody else that develops them and puts them in here We don't want to accept accountability for our actions It's just a cycle that we're going through right now Yes I wish that our people were more critical and

analytical and they could see through everything But they are caught up with the emotion

VASQUEZ Let me get to another item that is also about city politics Recently there was a very acrimonious set of hearings and public meetings surrounding the development of the Olvera Street area Why did that get so acrimonious-- especially between you and the other Mexican-American member of the city council?

ALATORRE Well on the latter that happened at the end But on the former the bottom-line issue was control of the street

VASQUEZ Amongst the merchants themselves?

ALATORRE Amongst the merchants themselves And all the other issues that were used as a smoke screen were really nonissues

VASQUEZ Tell me about some of the issues that were smoke screens?

ALATORRE Okay That Olvera Street was going to be commercialized--another Disneyland Olvera Street was going to be closed It was going to lose its Mexican authenticity Greedy developers were going to come in and displace the merchants

The merchants didn't have any protection They were going to be thrown out of business

VASQUEZ That it was going to be multinational

ALATORRE Oh with multinational flavor to it All of those things And I think what it pointed out is just what I said earlier that nobody knew People went there because somebody told them something And it was anywhere from They're going to close Olvera Street We need you there They're going to take away our street as a Chicano street And Anglos want to take it over They preyed on all of the hysteria that has gone on for a long time They knew what to pick at and they developed a weird coalition of people that were basically ill-informed

You know people who were arguing about the initial RFP and how bad it was were many of the same people who drafted it Nobody wanted to talk about that It's a question of equity that the merchants wanted They wanted equity on the street so that they would have a say-so It ended up being a non-issue only because we had wiped out the idea of a developer

We had a consensus about having an outside

developer come in The merchants have equity and the like Now when it got close to it happening then they became traumatized TELACU [The East Los Angeles Community Union] as an example was going to take over the street and they were going to be the developers And that everything I was doing was doing I was doing for them [TELACU] When the entire document was actually negotiated with them the mayor's office and my office

VASQUEZ So there was no hidden agenda?

ALATORRE So there was no hidden agenda At first it was Get the RFP out And then when I changed the document in two respects The real issue was equity That was a smoke screen And it was because initially we were under the assumption that one merchant association represented 90 percent of the merchants Only to find out that there were only 17 merchants who were unrepresented by any group And there were another 13 or 15 that were part of another group

VASQUEZ The first group was Vivian Bonzo's Olvera Street Merchants Association?

ALATORRE Yeah Vivian Bonzo's group So we negotiated 45

percent for the merchant's association 5 percent for the other merchant's association And at that time we thought it was fair But then as it turns out she may represent the majority of them But what happens to the rest of these merchants? There was a time when she was even going to exclude some of her membership because she said 'If you weren't in operation by this date you weren't going to be protected She did that and some of the merchants didn't know about it She was screwing the very people she claimed that she was representing

So my compromise was that every merchant have equity on a [prorated] basis That changed and the threat to her leadership further complicated and further distorted the reality that it was going to cost every merchant \$200 000 and that they were going to lose their puestos [stands] And these are frightened people These are not well-educated people You can prey on their ignorance But the worst part of it and the thing I detested most is we're preying on our own On the ignorance of our own for our own gain

So I won on that I got it out But it was such a poisoned document And then to only find out what equity's not [the issue] because now TELACU's not even involved "Well why do we need any developer?' Why didn't you tell me that from the beginning and then we could have gone the way that I wanted to go initially? Which was a nonprofit corporation

So now we do that and then it's Well you know what you're going to do is appoint your own friends And see I'm not stupid You know I want things My commitment to Olvera Street is to see the street restored to some beauty and to some [respectable] level We're always going to be proud of it man You know I'm not into making money for my friends I wouldn't be stupid enough to just appoint my friends because in order for it to work you have to have a credible body And even when I threw out some of the names [of people] who weren't even my supporters--but were credible people--they started attacking them

VASQUEZ Why?

ALATORRE Because they never thought number one that I

could interest somebody like this Then one other person says Vivian was trying to go into a joint venture to apply for the RFP Because [Daniel D] Danny Villanueva has a lot of money And she tried to entice him to join her group and to put a bid a package together to [become] the developers of the street Well then she turned around and says Oh back room deals You know same thing It's the buzz words

VASQUEZ So what I hear you saying is that the interest of a small group of leaders led by a vociferous person and misinformation generated the crowd they needed down there

ALATORRE Absolutely

VASQUEZ With all kinds of signs about "Richard Alatorre is selling out our own community ' "

ALATORRE Sure Sure

VASQUEZ our heritage It all boils down to that? Tell me how in the world City Councilwoman Molina ends up getting on that side?

ALATORRE Because I think that she had some you know misconceptions She is suspicious about TELACU She's befriended Vivian and Vivian's

befriended her And Vivian's smart She went to her figuring that she could get her against me

Look at what he's doing and he's trying to do this Look at us We're the merchants and everything else But I think it's to the point where she [Molina] got herself into it and she's not dumb I think she has seen through it And she has certain interests that are not inconsistent with mine So now where we're at is that we talk Tell me what your interests are These are my interests We just merge our interests and come up with something

VASQUEZ You met with her yesterday Do you think you have resolved this conflict?

ALATORRE Oh absolutely And if it gets down to that she becomes vocal she'll turn on Gloria

VASQUEZ Bonzo?

ALATORRE Right And Gloria will end up seeing that Because we're going to come up with a fair document

VASQUEZ What does this particular issue--which in and of itself may historically prove to be totally unimportant--underscore about the level of political sophistication and the level of

politics in general that take place in the Mexican-American community in Los Angeles in 1990?

ALATORRE Well you know what's happening now And what has happened in the past is that before it was other people manipulating us Now it's our own manipulating our own for whatever our ultimate objectives may be And so long as people in leadership allow that to happen without some rationality and unwillingness to participate in that whether we like each other or not we're always going to be viewed as stupid And all it takes is certain things to happen and you can create chaos

It's too bad that we can't learn as blacks have learned You take care of your business behind closed doors And you may hate each other but you just don't air it out there We're much more emotional about it and we're not We haven't reached the level of political sophistication where we can see through stupidity We're still polarized and it's unfortunate

Maybe from this experience Gloria and

I in resolving this we're going to be able if what we have discussed happens people are not going to be able to use one against the other You know I think that's part of the embryonic development in the political process But we've been there so long The only difference between what happened ten or fifteen years ago and today it's just a different person doing the same thing And that's manipulation And the worst form of manipulation is the manipulation of people from our own community That's the real tragedy I told Gloria I said One of the worst things and one of the unfortunate things about this whole thing is if I was doing something to the merchants I'm a big enough man to know what they're going to have to do and I have to suffer the consequences When I am not doing anything to hurt them maybe I'm not joining one group or another that is viewed as being '

A person can so manipulate innocent people and then use distortions and lies to bring people together And without even questioning they just will say Oh is that what's happening?

And say That must be what's happening And even I find it amongst our better educators that should be--they're educators professors--that should be above this They participate with the ignorant And consequently they're worse because they know better That's really unfortunate And they're responding as emotionally without facts as people on the street are reacting emotionally without facts It's a sad commentary

VASQUEZ Does it leave you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of Chicano politics?

ALATORRE I'm an eternal optimist As hard as it is you know what you're going through and it's easy to get disillusioned Why am I spending all this time? Why did I even get involved with Olvera Street as an example? I got it for one reason Yes this is part of the new economic renaissance in Los Angeles The last area that can be developed But I've always insisted that it's never going to be at the expense of Olvera Street And I've always insisted that Hey you can't develop competing markets across the street and kill Olvera Street So I've done all of that I got \$17 million from the

Earthquake Bond Act that I snuck in It was just a sentence that meant Olvera Street without spelling out Olvera Street And got them \$17 million that merchants were going to have to pay for if the RFP would have gone out That's all free money that's going to stabilize and bring the buildings up to seismic safety I mean all of these things and to get this headache? You know it's easy to get disillusioned but

VASQUEZ So what's the basis of your optimism?

ALATORRE That it's part of the painful growth of our community And the frustrating part is that it's at my expense [But] it will change It will be resolved

VASQUEZ Thank you for this interview

[End Tape 10 Side B]